NATION

SC rejects Justice Varma's plea against LS motion, probe panel

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BUSINESS

Rupee slips to historic low of 90.84 against USD

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SPORTS

U-19 WC: India start as favourites against B'desh

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Saffron flies high in M'rashtra civic polls

BJP-Sena alliance breaches Thackeray's Mumbai citadel; BJP bags 1,438 of 2,869 wards

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

The Maharashtra civic elections 2026, including the high-stakes Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) polls, delivered a strong mandate in favour of the BJP-led Mahayuti, marking a decisive shift in the state's urban political landscape. Across 27 civic bodies and 2,869 wards, the alliance emerged firmly ahead, capturing key municipal corporations and consolidating its dominance.

The BJP won the Navi Mumbai and Jalgaon municipal corporations, while the Congress emerged as the single largest party in Bhiwandi and Kolhapur as results of 11 out of 29 civic bodies were declared. Smaller parties made selective gains, even as traditional regional forces struggled to counter the BJP's governance-centric campaign.

The most striking outcome was the BJP's performance in Mumbai. In the 227-member BMC, India's richest civic body, the BJP won 86 seats, improving on its tally of 82 in 2017. Along with the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, the BJP moved decisively towards wresting control of the BMC from the Thackeray family after nearly 25 years. The combined challenge mounted by Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray, who allied after almost two decades, failed to stem the BJP's rise.

The results marked the weakest showing in over 20 years for the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT), raising questions about the future of the "Thackeray brand", particularly that of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena. Analysts attributed the BJP-led Mahayuti's success to a fragmented opposition, multi-cornered contests and direct fights between rival Shiv Sena factions that split the traditional Marathi vote. BJP also posted strong performances in other cities, leading in Pune and Nagpur municipal corporations, Navi Mumbai (42 of 67) and Thane, reinforcing its "triple-engine" governance narrative. Meanwhile, the AIMIM recorded its strongest-ever civic showing in Maharashtra, winning 95 seats across 13 municipal bodies, posing a challenge to the Samajwadi Party and Congress's minority vote base. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 3

BJP workers celebrate in Navi Mumbai on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

54.77%
polling recorded in 29 municipal corporations

Thank you, Maharashtra! The dynamic people of the state bless the NDA's agenda of pro-people good governance. Our track record and vision for development have struck a chord

—Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

THE MAHARASHTRA VERDICT

TOTAL WARDS: 2,869

BJP:	1,438
SENA:	405
CONG:	318
SENA UBT:	165
NCPAP:	157
AIMIM:	94
NCPSP:	35
MNS:	15
VBA:	14
OTHERS:	228

FOCUS ON MUMBAI

TOTAL WARDS: 227

BJP	86
SENA: UBT	67
SENA	28
CONG	24
MNS	6
NCPAP	3
NCPSP	1
VBA	0
OTHERS	10

*Result as of 10pm

GRAP III to return to Delhi as AQI worsens again

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Delhi's air quality is expected to enter the "severe" category in the coming days, with the Air Quality Index rising from 343 on Thursday to 354 on Friday. The Commission for Air Quality Management warned that slow wind speeds and stagnant meteorological conditions are likely to push the average AQI past the 400-mark. To prevent further deterioration, the CAQM's invoked Stage-III restrictions across the entire NCR. Under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), air quality is categorised into four stages: 'poor' (201–300), 'very poor' (301–400), 'severe'(401–450), and 'severe plus' (above 450). Commission official stated that this proactive move is effective immediately. *—PTI*

ED attaches Rs 140 cr Al Falah University assets

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday said it has attached land and buildings worth nearly Rs 140 crore belonging to Haryana-based Al Falah University and filed a charge sheet against Al Falah Group chairman Jawad Ahmed Siddiqui and his charitable trust under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. The ED alleged Siddiqui exercised dominant control over the trust and institutions, generating proceeds of crime by cheating students through false claims of accreditation. Siddiqui, arrested in November, is in judicial custody. The case emerged during probes into a terror module linked to the November 10 Red Fort blast. *—PTI*

X faces global outage; 2nd glitch in 4 days

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Grok, the AI chatbot integrated with social media platform X, suffered a major technical outage on Friday, leaving thousands of users in India and across the world unable to access the service. The disruption also affected X itself, which went down for the second time in four days, causing widespread inconvenience during peak evening hours in India. According to outage-tracking website Downdetector, reports of inaccessibility began around 8.40pm. Users from major cities including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad reported problems on both the mobile application and web platform. *—PTI*

R-Day Parade to mark 150 years of 'Vande Mataram'

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The sesquicentenary of 'Vande Mataram' will be the main theme of this year's Republic Day Parade in New Delhi. Backdrops along Kartavya Path will feature historic paintings illustrating the opening lines of the National Song, while floral displays will honour its composer, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. In a break from tradition, enclosure labels such as "VVIP" will be dropped, with seating areas instead named after Indian rivers. Defense Secretary RK Singh said the 77th Republic Day celebrations will include themed invitation cards, a balloon release at the parade's end, and nationwide band performances by the military and the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs). *—PTI*

Gauri Lankesh murder accused wins in Jalna

JALNA, 16 JAN

Shrikant Pangarkar, who is currently out on bail for the 2017 murder of journalist-activist Gauri Lankesh, has won a seat as a corporator in the Jalna Municipal Corporation.

Pangarkar secured a narrow victory in the Maharashtra civic body elections, winning Ward 13 as an Independent. He defeated the BJP's Raosaheb Dhoble. Pangarkar secured 2,661 votes, while Dhoble polled 2,477 votes.

Pangarkar faced opposition from nearly every major political force except for the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

Lankesh was shot dead outside her Bengaluru residence in September 2017, an event that triggered widespread national outrage. In August 2018, the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) arrested Pangarkar.

Pangarkar was booked under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), as well as the Explosives Act and the Explosive Substances Act. In September 2024, Pangarkar was granted bail by the Karnataka High Court.

Pangarkar had earlier served as a member of the Jalna Municipal Council from 2001 to 2006. After being denied a party ticket in 2011, he joined the right-wing Hindu Janjagruti Samiti. *—PTI*

India talks Chabahar port with US amid Iran tariffs

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

India is exploring various options regarding its involvement in the development of the strategically significant Chabahar port in Iran, in light of the Trump administration's threat to impose a 25 per cent additional tariff on countries engaging with Tehran. India has been a key player in the Chabahar port project, located on Iran's southern coast in the Sistan-Balochistan province.

The US imposed severe economic sanctions on Iran last September but granted India a six-month exemption for the Chabahar project, which is set to expire on 26 April. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated that New Delhi is actively engaging with the US regarding this issue.Reports suggest that India is in the process of transferring approximately USD 120 million committed for the project to reduce its direct exposure. A potential creation of a new entity to continue the port's development is also under consideration.

Jaiswal highlighted that the two-way trade between India and Iran stood at USD 1.6 billion last year and reaffirmed India's commitment to the safety of its approximately 9,000 citizens in Iran amid ongoing protests and a deteriorating security situation.

'NO ROLE IN FILM ON GALWAN'

Ahead of the release of Salman Khan's movie 'Battle of Galwan' -- based on the 2020 clash between Indian and Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley – MEA said issues regarding film-making in India are looked after by "relevant authorities", and the MEA has "no role" in this or such ventures. *—PTI*

Quota students can take general seats: SC

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

- The apex court overturned the 2013 Kerala High Court ruling on AAI recruitment favoring reserved category candidates.

The Supreme Court on Friday announced that candidates from reserved categories who score above the General Category cutoff must be counted against unreserved seats. The SC made the remarks while overturning a 2020 Kerala High Court order that restricted applicants to their respective quotas.

A bench comprising Justices M M Sundresh and Satish Chandra Sharma said, "a candidate belonging to reserve category (SC, ST and OBC) who has scored marks higher than the cut off marks for the General Category is to be treated as having qualified against an open or unreserved vacant post."

Justice Sharma, who authored the judgment, explained that the "unreserved" category is not a quota for general candidates but an open pool based strictly on merit, ensuring reserved seats go to the next most meritorious candidates within those categories.

The apex court overturned the 2013 Kerala High Court ruling on AAI recruitment favoring reserved category candidates.

30% WOMEN IN BAR COUNCIL ELECTIONS

A Supreme Court bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi ordered 30 per cent reservation for women advocates in the upcoming Bar Council elections of Punjab and Haryana. According to the earlier directions, the bench had ordered that, for the present year, 20 per cent of the seats in the state bar councils be filled through election of women members, while an additional 10 per cent be filled through co-option. *—PTI*

EC collects SIR docus from Amartya's home

KOLKATA, 16 JAN

Election Commission officials on Friday visited Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen's residence at Bolpur in Birbhum district and collected necessary documents in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the state.

"The officials from the Election Commission collected Prof Sen's Aadhaar card, voter identity card number, and the death certificate of his mother, Amita Sen. ," one of Sen's family members said. Sen is currently in the USA, where he is a Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University. The EC last week issued a notice to Sen, seeking a hearing on 16 January at his Santiniketan residence as part SIR. Given that the elector is over 85 years old, ERO and AERO officials, along with the BLO, visited his residence and completed the formalities. —PTI

Indigo pilot refuses to fly after duty hours; Thailand flight hit

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

Turbulent scenes erupted aboard an IndiGo flight from Mumbai to Thailand's Krabi after the pilot refused to fly past his duty hours on Thursday. The flight, 6E 1085, was due to take off at 4.05am but was delayed by over three hours, with records from flight-tracking service Flightradar24 showing it finally departed at 7.45am.

A video circulating on social media captures a heated dispute between frustrated passengers and cabin crew. Passengers expressed their fury, with one shouting, "What about our plans that we have had?" Another yelled, "Why the f*** is he hiding like a f***ing rat?" while another was seen kicking the plane's exit door.

In a statement, IndiGo explained that the delay resulted from multiple factors, including the late arrival of the incoming aircraft and air traffic congestion, compounded by crew exceeding their duty time limit. They also reported that two passengers behaved inappropriately and were declared unruly, later being deboarded and handed over to security agencies.

IndiGo acknowledged the inconvenience caused and assured that meals were provided during the wait. The flight eventually reached Krabi around 1 pm. *—PTI*

AFTER STAMPEDE

RCB plans crowd-control with AI-cameras at Chinnaswamy

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

Desperate to ensure that IPL matches are not taken away from the M Chinnaswamy Stadium here, the Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) franchise has proposed to Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) the installation of 300-350 AI-enabled cameras at the venue and offered to bear the estimated cost of Rs 4.50 crore for this crowd management initiative.

RCB has proposed in an official communication to the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA).

"RCB has proposed the installation of 300 to 350 AI-enabled cameras at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium. RCB has further committed to bearing the entire one-time cost of this initiative, estimated at approximately Rs 4.5 crore," the franchise said in a release.

"The advanced surveillance technology will empower the KSCA and law enforcement agencies to efficiently manage crowd movement, ensure disciplined queueing, monitor unauthorised access through real-time tracking of entries and exits, and significantly enhance overall fan safety," the franchise added.

All cricket was halted at the Chinnaswamy after 11 fans were killed in a stampede outside the venue during RCB's IPL trophy celebrations last year.

A state government-constituted task force is scheduled to submit its report on Saturday after monitoring the safety enhancement work currently in progress at the stadium premises.

The investigation had blamed the lack of crowd management measures for the deadly stampede on June 4 when lakhs thronged the venue to take part in RCB's celebrations. *—PTI*

All eyes on Nabin as BJP to elect new Prez on 20 Jan

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Nitin Nabin is likely to be elected as the president unopposed **PHOTO: @X/NARENDRAMODI**

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has announced the schedule for electing its national president, with nominations open on 19 January and the new leader to be revealed the following day. Party sources indicate that Nitin Nabin, the BJP's national working president, is poised to be elected unopposed, as no other candidates are expected to contest.

According to K Laxman, the national returning officer, nominations can be submitted between 2pm and 4pm on 19 January, with the possibility of withdrawal from 5pm to 6pm the same day. Should polling be necessary, it will occur on 20 January, with the new president announced later that day.

Nabin is set to succeed JP Nadda, who became the national president in January 2020 after initially serving as the BJP's national working president. The leadership backing Nabin's candidacy includes Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

At 45, Nabin, son of the late BJP veteran Nabin Kishore Prasad Sinha, is considered a dynamic and ideologically committed leader, having represented the Bankipur assembly constituency in Bihar and served as a minister in the state government twice. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

'Leadership row is between me, High Command & CM'

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar arrived in New Delhi and stated that the issue of the alleged power tussle was between himself, the Chief Minister and the party High Command. Asked if it he had discussed the possibility of a leadership change when he met Rahul Gandhi in Mysuru recently, Dy CM said: "How can I reveal the plans of our party?... If any information needs to be shared with the public, the General Secretary of the party would do it." Shivakumar had recently been appointed as the party's poll observer for the Assam election. He said he would meet Union Ministers about irrigation projects as well as party leaders when in Delhi.—*Salar News*

Tiger cub saved at BRT 5 days after mom's rescued

MYSURU, 16 JAN

Five days after rescuing a tigress at Nanjadevanapura village, bordering BRT Tiger Reserve in Chamarajanagar district, one of its four cubs was rescued by the Forest Department in the wee hours of Friday. The cub is a female and believed to be ten-months old. The foresters are now focusing on rescuing all the other three cubs as they lack hunting skills and could look for easy prey, which may cause human-animal conflicts. The Forest Department officials placed the mother tiger and carcass of the cattle in the cage where they had captured the mother tigress near Veerapura lake village surroundings and continued the operation. They also placed meat as bait in the cage along with the mother tigress. —*Salar News*

Teacher arrested for 'sexually assaulting' boy

DAKSHINA KANNADA, 16 JAN

The Moodubidire Police arrested Altaf, a teacher, for allegedly sexually assaulting a student and recording a nude video after luring him promising help with mathematics. The victim boy is a Class 10 student.

Police said the teacher promised to help the boy in mathematics, called him to his room, gave him intoxicating juice, recorded a nude video and sexually assaulted him. The teacher also assaulted the boy with a belt. Police said the accused warned him not to tell anyone, failing which he would be barred from examinations and killed. The boy's parents hospitalised him. During questioning by doctors the boy revealed the incident. The police have registered a POCSO case against the teacher and have arrested him.—*PTI*

Police raid fake milk unit, nab 8 from Andhra

KOLAR, 16 JAN

The Andersonpet police raided a manufacturing unit where fake milk was being produced and branded as Nandini and other brands. The police rounded up eight people on Thursday. The arrested individuals have been identified as Venkateshappa, 50; Balaji, 35; Dileep, 25; Balaraj, 33; Manohar, 28; Karthik, 29; Manoj, 22; and Manjunath, 55. Kolar Superintendent of Police (SP) Shivanshu Rajput said the police seized 350 500 gm packets of Nandini milk powder, 12 packets of millet milk laddu, seven 500 gm jaggery packets, 900 packets of palm oil, two mixer grinders, 51 cans and two four-wheelers. The SP said that a probe is on to find how Nandini milk powder that is not meant for sale and nutrition packets supplied to anganwadis came into the hands of the accused. —*PTI*

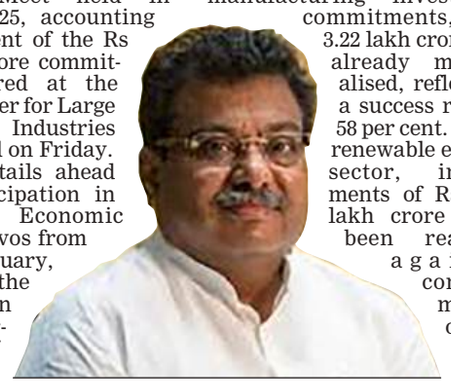
State nets ₹ 4.71L cr investment in 2025

Patil: 58% of the proposals have materialised

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

Karnataka has realised investments worth Rs 4.71 lakh crore within 11 months of its Global Investors' Meet held in February 2025, accounting for 46 per cent of the Rs 10.27 lakh crore commitments secured at the event, Minister for Large and Medium Industries MB Patil said on Friday.

Sharing details ahead of his participation in the World Economic Forum at Davos from 19 to 23 January, Patil said the State has seen rapid conversion of investment commitments into on-ground projects, driven by faster clearances and a fully digital single-window system.



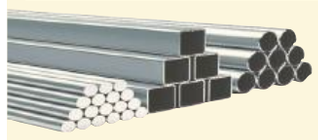
Of the Rs 5.66 lakh crore in manufacturing investment commitments, Rs 3.22 lakh crore has already materialised, reflecting a success rate of 58 per cent. In the renewable energy sector, investments of Rs 1.41 lakh crore have been realised against commitments of Rs 4.25 lakh crore, while the infrastructure development sector has seen Rs 8,500 crore realised out of Rs 45,000 crore committed, he said.

Patil said the State has moved beyond the Memorandum-of-Understanding (MoU) stage by streamlining land allotment, statutory approvals and application processing through a digital single-window platform integrating over 150 services across more than 30 departments.

Patil said that nearly 50 per cent of all investment proposals and about 60 per cent of manufacturing proposals have been submitted through Karnataka Udyog Mitra. —*PTI*

MANUFACTURING

₹9,300cr from Silfex to set up a silicon components facility for the semiconductor sector.



₹7,000cr from Jindal Steel for electrical steel manufacturing unit at Vijayanagar.

₹5,495cr from MV Energy for solar cell and module manufacturing in Bengaluru.

₹4,819cr from UltraTech Cement for a cement plant in Kalaburagi district.

₹3,000 CR & ₹3,020 CR from Dalmia Cement in Belagavi.

INVESTMENT GALORE

HERE'S A BREAKDOWN OF THE MAJOR INVESTMENT PROPOSALS BY FIRMS:

OTHERS

Balaji Wafers proposed ₹550 cr

ASM Technologies proposed ₹490 cr

Safran Electronics ₹250 cr for avionics and defence manufacturing.

ENERGY

₹12,032cr from Suzlon Energy in Vijayapura district.

₹8,134cr from Tata Power.

₹1,251cr from Volvo to expand its Hosakote facility.

₹710cr from Havells India in Tumakuru district to set up a new R&D centre.

SKM announces nationwide yatra

MYSURU, 16 JAN

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) National Convener Kurubur Shantha Kumar said that the non-political farmer's organisation will undertake a yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir from 7 February. The goal of the movement is to urge the Union government to implement the Minimum Support Price Guarantee Act for agriculture produce.

Addressing press in Mysuru on Friday, he said a convention for farmers will be held on 19 March at Ram Leela grounds at New Delhi. A memorandum including farmers' signatures collected during the rally will then be submitted to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He noted that despite the Supreme Court constituted High Powered panel of experts committee led by Justice Nawab Singh (retired) recommending a legal guarantee for MSP, the Centre had not acted.

Shantha Kumar claimed that farmers are suffering a loss of at least Rs 15 lakh crore loss annually due to the absence of the MSP. At least 70,000 farmers died by suicide across the country last year, he said.

During the yatra, farmers will also be sensitised about alleged anti-farmer policies, he said.

Farmer leaders Attahalli Devaraj, Baradanapura Nagaraj, and others were present. —*Salar News*

The SKM has spearheaded several nationwide farmers movemnets, including the Punjab protests **PHOTO: FB/KURUBUR SHANTHA KUMAR**

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah with Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti, actor Shivarajkumar and others during the inauguration of the 10 day Bengaluru Habba, in Bengaluru, on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Siddaramaiah flags BMC ink issue as new form of 'vote chori'

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

State Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday flagged media reports claiming indelible ink used during Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation polls could be wiped off easily, calling it another "troubling chapter" in what he described as "Vote Chori".

In a post on X, Siddaramaiah cited viral videos allegedly showing ink being removed with sanitiser, acetone and other agents, raising "grave concerns" about electoral credibility in Maharashtra and beyond. Stressing that democracy survives only when every vote is sacred, he said electoral safeguards must never be compromised.

"This is not an isolated glitch. It is part of a larger pattern where genuine questions are met with denial, deflection or silence, eroding trust in democratic institutions," he said, urging the Election Commission to act with transparency, accountability and corrective measures.

The Congress has intensified its nationwide campaign alleging "vote chori", led by Rahul Gandhi, targeting the BJP-led Centre and the Election Commission. The remarks came amid heightened political contestation following the BMC polls, as scrutiny of electoral processes and institutional credibility sharpened across parties and civil society. —*PTI*

3 Belagavi youth rescued from Cambodia scam

BELAGAVI, 16 JAN

The Belagavi Cyber Crime Police rescued three youths who were held hostage in Cambodia and forced to engage in cybercrime after being lured abroad with fake job promises.

Belagavi Police Commissioner Bhuban Borase confirmed the safe return of the three hostages - Akash Vitthal Kaginakar, and twin brothers Omkar Sambhaji Lokande and Sanskar Sambhaji Lokande – who were rescued by the Belagavi Crime, Economic and Narcotics (CEN) division.

Borase said they were promised data entry jobs in Hong Kong, Bangkok, with a monthly salary of Rs 1.25 lakh by Prasanna Hundre, a resident of Belagavi, and Asif and Amit from Punjab.

Instead, on 12 December, the victims were taken to Cambodia and sold to a crime syndicate for Rs 2.50 lakh. Once there, the three were forced to make fraudulent calls targeting Indians.

"We were kept in a den-like house for three days," Akash said.

Sachin Vitthal Kaginakar, Akash's brother, filed a complaint on 25 December.

Police are coordinating with Punjab Police to trace the accused. —*Salar News*

See how many Cong netas are on lease: HDK to Priyank

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

- HDK hit back after Priyank questioned the relevance of the JD(S), saying many Congress Ministers were from his party

Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy told IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge to focus on the condition of his own party instead of commenting on others. Check how many of your ministers are from the JD(S) on lease, Kumaraswamy said.

Responding to Priyank questioning the relevance of the JD(S), Kumaraswamy asserted that Congress has no authority to "issue certificates" to his party.

"Let him first ask his father (AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge) how many Ministers in the Congress are from JD(S) on lease," Kumaraswamy alleged. "From the Chief Minister (Siddaramaiah) downwards, do you know how many are originally from JD(S)?"

He claimed that Congress' arrogance had cost it dearly.

The JD(S)–BJP alliance unsettled the Congress leadership, Kumaraswamy claimed, noting that the partnership restricted Congress to just nine seats in the last Lok Sabha elections. He further claimed that had the JD(S) not made certain "mistakes," Congress would have been reduced to only three or four seats.

Kumaraswamy indicated that he would be focusing more on State politics. —*PTI*

BENGALURU HABBA BEGINS

Artistes participate in a cultural event during the inauguration of the 10-day Bengaluru Habba- 2026, in front of Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Friday. Plays, concerts and exhibitions will be held at 31 different venues across the City during the Habba from 16-25 January **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Ashoka flags attacks against officials to Chief Secretary

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka submitted a memorandum to the Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh flagging an alleged increase in "politically motivated" attacks. Ashoka noted Congress leader Rajeev Gowda allegedly threatened Sidlaghatta City Muncipal Corporation head Amrutha Gowda.

"The repeated occurrence of such political interference... has severely dented the morale of... employees," he stated.

Ashoka noted various incidents, including Valmiki Corporation Accountant Chandrashekhar committing suicide in May 2024 in connection with the Valmiki Corporation scam and the Chief Minister "demoralising" police officers by allegedly attacking ASC Narayana Bharamani in Belagavi. Ashoka urged the State to take legal action to restore trust.

Meanwhile, KPCC General Secretary S Manohar wrote to Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and demanded Rajeev's suspension. —*Salar*

HISTORY IN THE MAKING?

Gold find triggers excavation in Lakkundi

GADAG, 16 JAN

The State government on Friday launched an excavation in Lakkundi village in Gadag district after the discovery of gold ornaments, triggering speculation that the village could be shifted depending on findings.

Excavation began at the Kote Veerabhadreshwara Temple premises, with JCBs, trucks and tractors deployed to dig a notified 10 metre by 10 metre area. The project is being jointly undertaken by the Department of Tourism, the Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage, the Lakkundi Heritage Development Authority and the district administration.

"We have roped in 15 women and five men for this job," an officer involved in the excavation said. Gadag Deputy Commissioner CN Sridhar said the possibility of shifting the village would be assessed after reviewing excavation results. "Shifting the village depends on what comes out from the excavation. If the situation arises, the decision will be taken at the State government level," he told reporters.

Excavation began at the Kote Veerabhadreshwara Temple premises in Gadag disticts, with JCBs, trucks and tractors deployed **PHOTO: X**

The operation comes after a boy discovered a small copper pot containing 470 grams of gold ornaments, believed to be 300 to 400 years old, during house construction. The boy handed over the find to the district administration and was felicitated.

Once ruled by the Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Hoysalas, Kalchuris and Vijayanagara kings, Lakkundi was a prosperous centre where gold coins were minted. Archaeology department sources said the region may still hold buried valuables. Thousands of artefacts were unearthed.

Archaeologists said the fresh excavation is of high historical importance and is expected to yield inscriptions, monuments, sculptures and ornaments linked to Karnataka's medieval history. —*PTI*

Protect Kadugodi Reserve Forest: Citizens to govt

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

A citizen group urged the State government to step up measures to protect the 711 Kadugodi Reserve Forest, which they alleged had been "been reduced drastically by encroachments and unauthorised land use".

In a public letter to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, the Civic Opposition of India said that despite a 15 May, 2025 Supreme Court directive that forest land recorded in Revenue records should be transferred to the Forest Department, a large portion remains threatened by construction and "opaque allotments". In June last year, the Forest Department reclaimed around 200 acres of land.

The group noted that the Kadugodi forest was one of the last significant urban forest

patches remaining within the City and an important breathing zone.

"Field reports and citizen documentation show that most of the original forest land has been compromised by real estate and infras pressures," the group stated."Construction activities continue near Whitefield despite legal obligations to protect this land." The group urged the government to "cease all ongoing and planned constructions, encroachments.—*Salar News*

Pawar family reunion plan fails in Pune, Pimpri

NCP's loss in the municipal polls in Pune is expected to weaken Ajit's clout within the Mahayuti

PUNE, 16 JAN

Despite forging an alliance with the faction led by his uncle, NCP chief and Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar failed to retain the party's traditional strongholds of Pune and neighbouring Pimpri-Chinchwad, as the BJP swept both municipal corporation elections on Friday.

Ajit Pawar had launched a frontal attack on his state-level ally, the BJP, during the campaign, accusing the saffron party's local leadership of derailed development and corruption over the past nine years in the two civic bodies. However, the strategy did not yield results.

The NCP's sharply reduced presence in Pune is expected to significantly weaken Ajit Pawar's clout within the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance. In a bid to halt the BJP's growing dominance in the region, he had joined hands with the NCP (Sharad Pawar) more than two years after breaking away from uncle Sharad Pawar and splitting the party.

In Pune, Ajit Pawar directly took on Union Minister and BJP MP Murlidhar Mohol, while in Pimpri-Chinchwad he targeted local BJP MLA Mahesh Landge, alleging large-scale corruption in the civic body. Despite this, trends showed the BJP heading for emphatic victories in both cities. In Pune, the BJP was leading in over 110 seats, while the NCP and NCP (SP) were ahead in 12 and two seats respectively. In Pimpri-Chinchwad, the BJP was leading in 84 seats, compared with the NCP's 37.

Sharad Pawar was largely absent from the campaign, while his daughter and Baramati MP Supriya Sule also kept a low profile.

Speaking to PTI, Pune city NCP executive president Pradeep Deshmukh said Ajit Pawar had campaigned extensively and presented a "well-balanced" manifesto, including free Metro and bus rides, property tax exemption for homes under 500 sq ft, and improved water supply. —*PTI*

Ajit Pawar had joined hands with Sharad Pawar more than two years after breaking away from the party **PHOTO: PTI**

> Election commission gaslighting citizens is how trust has collapsed in our democracy. Vote Chori is an anti-national act
>
> -Rahul Gandhi, Cong leader, on indelible ink row

CONG SWEEPS LATUR CIVIC BODY POLLS WITH 43 SEATS

LATUR, 16 JAN

Congress registered a decisive victory in the Latur Municipal Corporation elections on Friday, winning 43 of the 70 seats and relegating the BJP to a distant second with 22 seats. The Vanchit Bahujan Aaghadi secured four seats, while the Nationalist Congress Party won one.

Political observers said the outcome reflected a strong endorsement of late Congress stalwart and former chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh's legacy, and a backlash against controversial remarks made by Maharashtra BJP president Ravindra Chavan during the campaign. Chavan had said Deshmukh's memory would be "wiped out" from his hometown Latur, a comment he later apologised for but which drew widespread criticism.

Voting was held on Thursday and counting concluded on Friday afternoon. The result marked a sharp reversal from the 2017 civic polls, when the BJP had emerged as the single largest party with 36 seats, narrowly ahead of the Congress's 33.

Congress's Deepak Sul and ex-mayor Vikrant Gojamgunde won, while former mayor Smita Khanapure lost. Observers said the verdict underlined Deshmukh's enduring emotional connect with the region. —*PTI*

Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar arrives as party workers clebrate the party's victory in Chandrapur on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Colaba logs Mumbai's lowest turnout at 20%

Civic ward 227 in Colaba recorded a dismal 20.88 per cent voter turnout, the lowest in Mumbai during the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation elections. Out of 46,036 eligible voters, only 9,614 residents cast their votes, less than half of the city's overall 52.94 per cent turnout. Wards 226 and 225 fared better with 50.69 per cent and 45.59 per cent participation, respectively—*PTI*

Cops intervene as supporters of 2 candidates clash

Supporters of two candidates clashed in the Manpada ward 3 area of Thane during civic polls, prompting police intervention. Former mayor Meenakshi Shinde, Shiv Sena nominee, alleged independent rival Bhushan Bhoir mobilised armed supporters, while Bhoir's camp accused Shinde's group of using chilli powder. Tensions peaked when a bus carrying ballot boxes was intercepted and vandalism attempted. Thane DCP Prashant Kadam said the situation is under control, with ballot boxes at the strongroom. —*PTI*

Jalgaon Sena candidate wins from jail

Lalit Kolhe, a Shiv Sena member and a former Jalgaon mayor, currently lodged in jail over an alleged fake call centre scam, contested the election from prison and was declared elected in Ward 11 of Jalgaon City Municipal Corporation. His mother Sindhutai and son Piyush also won seats. Kolhe's wife, Sarita, said, "Voters have shown their loyalty and love."—*Agencies*

Both daughters of ex-gangster lose in BMC polls

In a blow to gangster-turned-politician Arun Gawli, both his daughters, Geeta and Yogita Gawli, lost in the BMC elections. Geeta was defeated by Samajwadi Party's Amreen Shehzan Abrahani in Ward 212, while Yogita lost to BJP's Rohidas Lokhande in Ward 207, highlighting the family's waning-influence. —*Agencies*

Muslim parties win big in Malegaon

The Indian Secular Largest Assembly of Maharashtra (ISLAM) party has emerged as the single largest outfit in Malegaon Municipal Corporation in Nashik district, trends and civic poll results showed on Friday. It has won 35 out of 84 seats in the civic body, while the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) was in second place with 21 seats. The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena has got 18 seats, followed by five for the Samajwadi Party and three for the Congress. The BJP has been able to win two seats in the Muslim-dominated town.—*PTI*

Shiv Sena (UBT) members celebrate in Mumbai on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Mamata Thakur, Mausam Noor face RS privileges probe

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Rajya Sabha privileges committee will probe a complaint against TMC MP Mamata Thakur and former MP Mausam Noor over alleged breach of privilege and contempt during debates on the Viksit Bharat–Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, 2025. BJP MP Laxmikant Bajpai alleged that the two MPs made "unparliamentary utterances," disrupted proceedings, entered the Well, and obstructed officials on 18–19 December. The Rajya Sabha Chairman has referred the matter under Rule 203 to the Committee of Privileges for investigation. Noor resigned on 5 January, after leaving TMC for Congress. The VB-G RAM Bill, replacing MGNREGA, was passed on 19 December, amid opposition protests.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

2020 Delhi riots: Court acquits two of rioting, arson

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

A court here has acquitted two people in the 2020 northeast Delhi riots case, saying the prosecution failed to prove their role in it. Additional sessions judge Parveen Singh heard the case against Prashant Malhotra and Gaurav, who were accused of being part of a riotous mob that torched a shop on 24 February, 2020, and committed arson and vandalism in the Chand Bagh area. The duo was arrested after the owner of a fruit shop in Chandh Bagh, Ganesh, filed a complaint alleging that his shop and house were torched by a mob. The accused were identified from a viral video of the rioting. The court noted that the video, which was relied upon by the prosecution, did not pertain to the same incident and did not prove their guilt.—*PTI*

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis receives sweets from state BJP President Ravindra Chavan following the party's victory; BJP workers celebrate their victory in Thane and Solapur on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

ED to add MHA in I-PAC's SC plea

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has moved the Supreme Court seeking to add the Union Home Ministry and Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) as parties in its plea regarding alleged interference in and obstruction of its probe by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a raid at I-PAC premises and its director Pratik Jain's house in Kolkata in connection with a coal 'scam' case.

In its appeal, the agency sought "impleadment of proposed respondents 7-9" as respondents in the present criminal writ petition, failing which, it said, the agency "shall suffer irreparable loss and injury."

ED petition stated, respondent No. 7 is DoPT and No. 8 is home ministry, through their respective secretaries, whereas respondent No. 9 is the State of WB through its chief secretary.

The agency submitted that respondents 7-9 are necessary parties in the present matter to initiate actions against the erring senior police officers, who were allegedly party to the disruption of ED's search proceedings on January 8.

ED's impleadment plea assumes significance as it is checking the authenticity of reports that West Bengal Chief Secretary Nandini Chakravorty accompanied the CM when she went to the I-PAC office.

WB to gets Rs 30,000 cr deals

IT secretary Shubhanjan Das said that the state's IT sector is poised for an investm,ent of Rs 30,000 crores. —*PTI*

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

AAP govt muzzles media: Oppn after Punjab Kesari raids

JALANDAR, 16 JAN

Opposition parties in Punjab hit out at the AAP government, alleging it was using state power to muzzle the press.

The attack came after the Punjab Kesari newspaper group on Thursday wrote to Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, alleging that it was being targeted with multiple raids by enforcement authorities. These began with a "balanced and fair" news report on opposition allegations against the ruling AAP's national convenor.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

Leader of Opposition in Punjab Partap Singh Bajwa alleged that the ruling AAP is using state power to muzzle the press,

BJP state president Sunil Jakhar said that a BJP delegation will meet the Governor regarding the issue.

SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal also condemned the alleged action on the newspaper group

The Punjab government rejected the Punjab Kesari group's allegations.

Bajwa said on X, "From FIRs against journalists to raids and ad blockades, this is a clear pattern…"

Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring called it "highly outrageous and condemnable. —*PTI*

PHONE-TAPPING CASE

SC asks T'gana if it wants to keep official jailed till he breaks down

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday questioned the Telangana government whether it wanted to keep former state Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB) chief T Prabhakar Rao in jail till he broke down.

SC heard an anticipatory bail application filed by Rao, who is an accused in a phone-tapping case.

The court expressed inclination to make "absolute" its order of interim bail to the former IPS officer.

However, senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, appearing for Telangana, opposed it and said larger questions of law are involved. Luthra requested the court to consider whether a person declared an absconder and residing overseas could have even applied for anticipatory bail.

The top court said the state police can still call him for interrogation.

It had ordered the surrender and custody of Rao as an "interim Article 142" measure to help in the investigation.

Rao had surrendered before the police the next day.

The Telangana government earlier alleged that Rao was still withholding his iCloud accounts despite the court order.

Rao has moved the top court challenging an order of the Telangana High Court, which dismissed his plea seeking anticipatory bail. He and three others were accused of "misusing" the resources of SIB for political purposes by putting citizens under surveillance. —*PTI*

SC REJECTS PLEA AGAINST GLITCHES IN WAQF PORTAL

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a petition alleging technical and structural deficiencies in the Unified Waqf Management, Em powerment, Efficiency and Development (UMEED) portal.

The apex court observed that the issues raised were largely administrative in nature. However, it granted liberty to petitioner Hashmat Ali, a waqf mutawalli (caretaker) from Madhya Pradesg to approach the appropriate authorities for redressal of grievances.

Ali's counsel said the high court was unlikely to entertain the matter since challenges to the 2025 amendments to the Waqf law were already pending before the top court.

She said that the category of 'Waqf by survey' had been subsumed under 'Waqf by user,' and that the UMEED Portal did not provide any separate option for 'Waqf by survey' in its drop-down menu.

Ali challenged the enforceability of the digital uploading mandate and alleged that the UMEED portal was structurally defectivefor registering waqf properties.

SC had refused to extend time for the mandatory registration of waqf properties under the portal. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Mamkootathil's pal 'reveals' survivor's identity, booked

PATHANAMTHITTA, 16 JAN

Pathanamthitta cyper police booked Fenin Ninan, an associate of expelled Congress MLA Rahul Mamkootathil, under non-bailable charges for allegedly revealing the identity of a sexual assault victim. Mamkootathil was arrested on 11 January following the same victim's police complaint for sexual assault. Ninan disclosed the details in a Facebook post on Friday. The victim released an audio clip alleging Fenin Ninan contacted her on Instagram and selectively shared chats, creating a misleading narrative. He is also facing two other sexual harassment cases. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X/POLICE

4 of Godara–Goldy Brar gang held in Haryana

GURUGRAM, 16 JAN

A Special Task Force (STF) arrested four members of the Rohit Godara-Goldy Brar gang. Raman, Lokesh, Balraj, and Ravinder of Kaithal district were allegedly involved in US-based organised crime. The accused ran extortion rackets for the gang and allegedly orchestrated firing incidents across India. During interrogation, they admitted being involved in the 2024 murder of gangster Sunil Yadav in California. Earlier, they carried out an attack on gangster Harry Boxer in the US, in which associate Banwari Godara was killed. *—PTI*

Man held for raping his two daughters

JODHPUR, 16 JAN

A man was arrested on Friday for sexually abusing his two daughters, one of them for over 12 years, police said. The man, a labourer, was found hiding on Collectorate premises. Police recorded the statements of both victims and conducted medical examinations. The alleged abuse came to light when the man molested his 15-year-old younger daughter, who told her elder sister about it, and found that she had been abused for over 12 years. Police said the abuse began when the elder daughter was only six years old. He used threats to silence her. The daughter remained silent while her father exploited her for nearly 12 years. The latest rape occurred just one month ago. Recently, the man allegedly molested the younger daughter. She shared it with her elder sister. The younger sister then convinced her elder sister to reveal to their mother. The mother confronted the father and he went into hiding three days ago. *—PTI*

'Safe public roads are integral part of Right to Life'

CHANDIGARH, 16 JAN

Maintaining safe roads is not merely an administrative obligation but a human rights imperative, and the safe use of public roads by citizens is an integral part of the Right to Life guaranteed under the Constitution, the Haryana Human Rights Commission has held. The Commission said any failure on part of the road authority to ensure basic road safety exposes road users to avoidable risks, resulting in violation of their human rights. The State has a constitutional duty to provide safe public roads, and negligence in this regard amounts to infringement of the fundamental and human rights of citizens, the Commission observed. *—PTI*

SC rejects Justice Varma's plea against LS motion, probe panel

RS Deputy Chairman can function as chairman, if chairman absent: SC

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a plea by Allahabad High Court judge Yashwant Varma challenging the Lok Sabha Speaker's decision to admit a motion seeking his removal and the legality of the parliamentary panel probing corruption charges against him.

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and SC Sharma, which had reserved its decision on 8 January on Varma's plea, pronounced the verdict.

On 8 January, the SC said that if the Vice President can exercise the functions of the President in the absence of the President, then why can't the Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman exercise the functions of the Chairman, if the Chairman is absent. The remarks were made by the bench which refused to agree with the submission made on behalf of Justice Varma that the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha had no power to reject a motion and, under the Judges (Inquiry) Act of 1968, only the Speaker and the chairman have the power to accept or reject a motion against a judge. Justice Varma was repatriated from the Delhi High Court to the Allahabad High Court after burnt wads of currency notes were found at his official residence in New Delhi on 14 March.

A file photo of Allahabad High Court Judge Yashwant Varma who is facing a Lok Sabha motion seeking his removal PHOTO: AI

The SC had earlier observed that there was no bar under the Judges Inquiry Act on Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla setting up an inquiry committee to probe corruption charges against Varma after a similar motion was rejected in the Rajya Sabha.

The then CJI, Sanjiv Khanna, had initiated an in-house inquiry and constituted a three-member committee comprising Punjab and Haryana HC Chief Justice Sheel Nagu, Himachal Pradesh HC Chief Justice G S Sandhawalia and Karnataka HC Justice Anu Sivaraman.

The committee submitted its report on 4 May finding Justice Varma guilty of misconduct. *—PTI*

Article 32 being misused, says SC

The Supreme Court slammed a petitioner for filing a plea under Article 32, which gives citizens the right to seek constitutional remedies over violation of fundamental rights, despite a petition pending before the Bombay HC.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan said on Friday that Article 32 is being misused by filing petitions even about adjournments in HCs. "Article 32 is being misused. The number of cases filed under Article 32 has increased exponentially. Those living near Delhi are filing Article 32 petitions. It is a misuse," the bench said. *—PTI*

SC fiat to T'gana speaker on BRS MLAs

The SC asked the Telangana Assembly Speaker to apprise it in two weeks about the status of the adjudication of disqualification pleas against BRS MLAs, who had defected to the ruling Congress. A bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and AG Masih gave two weeks to the Speaker on Friday to file a status report indicating the steps taken for the adjudication of the disqualification pleas. *—PTI*

SC seeks Karisma's response on Priya Kapur's plea

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Supreme Court sought the response of Karisma Kapoor on a plea of Priya Sachdev Kapur seeking a certified copy of the divorce settlement arrived at in 2016 in the SC between her late husband Sunjay Kapur and the Bollywood actor.

Priya Sachdeva Kapur, widow of industrialist Sunjay Kapur, is fighting a legal battle in the Delhi HC. Last September, the two children of Karisma Kapoor moved the HC seeking shares in their late father Sunjay Kapur's assets and challenged his 21 March 2025 will, which leaves his entire estate to their step-mother, Priya Sachdev Kapur.

On Friday, a bench of Justice A S Chandurkar took up the plea of Priya Sachdev Kapur and sought Karisma's response in two weeks.

Karisma submitted that the consent terms and the divorce decree were already with Priya Sachdev Kapur. *— PTI*

SC stays Calcutta HC verdict disqualifying WB MLA Mukul

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Supreme Court stayed the Calcutta High Court verdict disqualifying Mukul Roy as an MLA of the West Bengal Assembly after he defected to the ruling Trinamool Congress from the BJP.

The high court, on 13 November 2025, had disqualified Roy under the anti-defection law for crossing over to the TMC.

On Friday, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi passed the interim order while issuing notice on a petition filed by Roy's son Subhranshu Roy, challenging the high court's decision.

The bench directed that the high court's judgment shall remain in abeyance.

Lawyer Preetika Dwivedi, who represented Subhranshu Roy, said that Mukul was ailing and claimed that the high court exceeded its jurisdiction by ordering his disqualification.

- The Calcutta High Court had disqualified Mukul Roy on 13 November 2025 as per the anti-defection law for crossing over to the Trinamool Congress after getting elected on a BJP ticket

She said the speaker had rejected the petitions for disqualification on the ground that the social media posts submitted to show the alleged defection of Mukul Roy were not authenticated as per Section 65B of the Evidence Act.

The high court reversed the speaker's decision observing that strict adherence to Section 65B was not necessary in proceedings under the tenth schedule of the Constitution.

Advocate Gaurav Agarwal, appearing for BJP leaders Suvendhu Adhikari and Ambika Roy, said Roy had contested on a BJP ticket and had later openly joined the TMC. He also objected to the filing of the petition by Roy's son.

The CJI said that electronic evidence needs to be proved as authentic, as there were AI-generated videos. *— PTI*

Cow vigilantes lynch Muslim man in Odisha

BHUBANESHWAR, 16 JAN

A 35-year-old Muslim man was lynched in Odisha's Balasore district in the early hours of Wednesday after a pickup van he was travelling in was allegedly intercepted while transporting cattle. The victim, identified as SK Makandar Mahammad, succumbed during treatment at the Balasore district hospital.

The van was coming from the Jayadeva Kasba side when a group flagged it down and began assaulting both the driver and Mahammad.

Police registered an FIR based on a complaint related to the pickup van accident. According to this FIR, the vehicle, allegedly being driven rashly, lost balance and overturned. It stated that by the time police reached the spot, the driver had already been shifted to a hospital and a cow was found at the site.

"The cow was seized and brought to the Maa Bharati Goshala, and the vehicle was brought to the police station. The complainant submitted a report requesting action against the owner and driver of the van," the FIR noted.

Later, a second FIR was registered following a complaint by the victim's brother, SK Jitendar Mahammad who said that five men had assaulted his brother. Based on the second complaint, police booked five accused under Section 103(2) of the BNS. *— PTI*

The relatives of patients admitted at the AIIMS hospital in New Delhi seen taking shelter at night on its premises PHOTO: PTI

Land alloted for shelter for patients' kin: AIIMS

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The AIIMS on Friday told the Delhi High Court that it has provided land to the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) for constructing 80 night shelters for the families of patients.

AIIMS will also build Vishram Sadan, a 3,000-bedded rest house for them at Ansari Nagar West here.

The court was hearing a suo motu petition after taking cognisance of a news report on "pitiable condition" of patients and their kin staying on the streets while awaiting treatment outside AIIMS.

Currently, there are 949 beds for the needy in three shelter centres.

The bench asked the Delhi High Court Bar Association to raise funds for the rest house.

The high court had said the government must provide adequate shelter to those awaiting treatment in hospitals and directed the authorities to provide adequate night shelter to meet the current exigency caused by the ongoing cold wave.

Counsel for DUSIB said 20 new pagodas were set up near AIIMS and Safdarjung and more would be erected by the evening. 20 tents each were also erected near RML Hospital and Lady Hardinge Hospital. Nodal officers were appointed to monitor them.

The court asked the nodal officers to be on "constant vigil" to address any deficiencies and ordered another meeting of the stakeholders on 24 January. *— PTI*

Jharkhand police raid on ED office 'pre-planned': HC

RANCHI, 16 JAN

The Jharkhand High Court on Friday observed that the recent police raid on the Enforcement Directorate office here prima facie appears "pre-planned."

Justice Sanjay Kumar Dwide, while hearing a writ petition filed by the ED, directed the ED to make the Union home secretary a party in the case. The court ordered the Union home secretary to depute CRPF/BSF to provide security to the ED office.

Justice Dwide also directed Ranchi SSP Ranjan to ensure the security of the ED office. The court said that if there is any lapse in the security of the ED office, the SSP will be held responsible. The HC also stayed the probe against ED officers on the basis of an FIR registered by former Jharkhand government employee, Santosh. *— PTI*

In UN, India flays Pak's 'agenda' over Kashmir

UNITED NATIONS, 16 JAN

India called out Pakistan for misusing UN platforms to drive its "divisive agenda" after Islamabad's envoy raised the issue of Jammu and Kashmir in the General Assembly.

Counsellor in the Permanent Mission of India to the UN Eldos Mathew Punnoose on Thursday said that the right to self-determination must not be abused to encourage secession in pluralistic and democratic states.

"At a time when member states have to rise beyond their narrow considerations, Pakistan continues to misuse in the UN to drive their divisive agenda," Punnoose said.

"This forum is no exception either and Pakistan made an unwarranted reference to Jammu and Kashmir, an integral part of India," Punnoose said, while delivering the national statement at the UN General Assembly Plenary.

"The right to self-determination is a fundamental principle enshrined in the UN Charter. However, this right must not be abused to encourage secession in pluralistic and democratic states. Though habituated, Pakistan would do well if they do not resort to baseless allegations and falsehoods and portray a picture that is completely detached from reality," he said.

The strong reaction of India came after the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN Ambassador, Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, made a reference to the Indian UT of Jammu and Kashmir. *— PTI*

NH BLOCKED AFTER MIGRANT'S DEATH TRIGGERS WB STIR

KOLKATA, 16 JAN

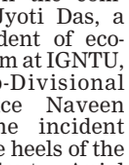
A wave of violent protests over the death of a Bengali migrant in Jharkhand brought parts of West Bengal's Murshidabad district to a standstill on Friday, as angry locals blocked railway tracks and NH-12 for hours, leaving thousands of passengers stranded and disrupting traffic on the road, police said.

Tensions flared as the mob vandalised a traffic kiosk and damaged a police vehicle. Brickbatting left at least 12 people injured, many of them media personnel.

A woman journalist from a Bengali news channel was allegedly assaulted by unruly protesters. Another journalist sustained serious injuries and was admitted to Murshidabad Medical College and Hospital.

The flashpoint was the death of 36-year-old Alauddin Sheikh, a resident of Sujapur Kumarpur gram panchayat of Murshidabad district, in Jharkhand, where he worked as a scrap dealer. *— PTI*

> **Migrant labourers from Bengal are being tortured in BJP-ruled states for speaking Bengali. This is illegal and cannot go on. We stand by their families**
> -Mamata Banerjee, WB Chief Minister



WORLDWIDE PANDEMIC

India has world's second largest number of diabetic patients

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

At 90 million, India ranked second in the number of adults living with diabetes in 2024. China was first at 148 million and the US ranked third at 39 million, according to a study published in 'The Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology Jjournal.'

Researchers, including those from the International Diabetes Federation in Belgium and the India Diabetes Research Foundation and the Dr A Ramachandran's Diabetes Hospital in Chennai, said countries with large populations, like China, India, the US, and Pakistan, contribute a very large share of the number of people with diabetes worldwide.

They projected that Pakistan could surpass the US by 2050.

The eleventh edition of the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) Diabetes Atlas provides national, regional and global diabetes prevalence estimates for 2024, with projections to 2050.

Estimates were provided for 215 countries and territories after analysing 246 studies conducted between 2005 and 2024.

Over 11 per cent of the world's adult population, or 589 million adults aged 20-79, were affected by the metabolic disorder in 2024 and nearly 13 per cent (853 million adults) are projected to be affected by 2050, the study said.

"In 2024, one in nine adults worldwide was living with diabetes condition. The number of adults with diabetes in 2024 exceeded 500 million and is projected to rise to close to 900 million by 2050," the authors wrote. *— PTI*

Child killed as nilgai jumps into moving car

GUNA, 16 JAN

A four-year-old girl sitting on her mother's lap died after a nilgai (blue bull) crashed into their moving car in Madhya Pradesh's Guna district, officials said on Friday.

The freak incident occurred around 6.45 pm on Wednesday near the Bilonia village, they said.

Guna resident Sonu Jat was driving with his wife and daughter Tanya to their village, Magrada, to celebrate Makar Sankranti.

As their car crossed the Do Khambha area on the Guna bypass, two nilgai suddenly came running onto the road, police said.

Before Sonu could react, one nilgai leapt, crashed through the windshield, and landed inside the car. The animal's legs struck the head of Tanya, who was sitting in her mother's lap, said Cantonment police station in-charge TI Anoop Bhargava.

- Before Sonu could react, one nilgai leapt and crashed through the windshield into the car. Its legs hit Tanya's head and she died

The forest department later rescued the critically injured nilgai which was trapped inside the car. *— PTI*

5 expelled from MP varsity for assaulting student

ANUPPUR, 16 JAN

Five students have been expelled and booked for allegedly assaulting a 22-year-old postgraduate student from Assam at a hostel of the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University in Amarkantak of Madhya Pradesh's Anuppur district, an official said.

An FIR was registered against the five accused students shortly before midnight on Wednesday on the complaint of Hiros Jyoti Das, a postgraduate student of economics from Assam at IGNTU, Anuppur Sub-Divisional Officer of Police Naveen Tiwari said. The incident comes close on the heels of the death of student Anjel Chakma, from Tripura in the North East, in Dehradun last month. *—PTI*

COLOURING THE SKYLINE

Hot air balloons filled the skies over Hyderabad on Friday as the Hot Air Balloon Festival kicked off, offering a spectacular aerial view of the city. The three-day festival, running until 18 January, is being held near Hyderabad's historic Golconda Fort. Each ride lasts between 30 and 40 minutes, covering a distance of 8–10km, and is priced at approximately Rs 2,000. The experience is open to participants aged five and above
PHOTO: PTI

Multi-way fights put BJP in driver's seat in Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis celebrates the party's victory in the BMC elections 2026, in Mumbai, on Friday
PHOTO: PTI

Multi-cornered contests, deep divisions within the Opposition MVA, reflected in the Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) fighting separately and lack of a robust plan among its rivals helped the BJP in Mumbai polls as it looks poised to rule India's richest civic body for the first time. As per trends telecast by TV news channels on Friday evening for 210 of the total 227 seats in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the BJP was leading in 90 seats followed by Shiv Sena (28), Shiv Sena-UBT (57), MNS (9), Congress (15), NCP (3) and others 8.

The BJP contested the 15 January polls in an alliance with the Shiv Sena led by Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, while Shiv Sena (UBT) and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), headed by Uddhav and Raj Thackeray, respectively, had a pre-poll pact.

Congress, part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) along with Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) at the state level, tied with the Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) and Rashtriya Samaj Paksh (RSP).

The underwhelming performance of the Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress has dealt a severe blow to the MVA, exposing deep organizational weaknesses and raising questions about the Opposition bloc's ability to challenge the BJP-led ruling dispensation in Maharashtra.

Political observers pointed out that internal contradictions within the MVA, ideological differences between Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT), personality clashes, and lack of coordinated strategy have undermined the alliance's effectiveness in the polls.

The split in the original Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), coupled with the Congress's decision to contest independently, effectively diluted anti-BJP vote share across nearly 200 wards.

The poor showing of the Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) in Mumbai, once considered their stronghold, marks a significant political setback for both parties.

For Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT), the outcome represents nothing short of a political disaster. The loss of Mumbai, the city that was the launchpad of the original Shiv Sena movement and remained under the party's control for over two decades, symbolizes the dramatic decline in the outfit since the 2022 split.

The analysts said if trends transform into final results, they will vindicate Shinde's claim to being the "real" inheritor of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray's legacy and suggest that a significant section of traditional party voters have shifted allegiance to the ruling alliance constituent.

The debacle could marginalize Uddhav Thackeray within the Opposition bloc. If the MVA regroups later, Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar, whose party NCP (SP) is also a partner in the alliance, could be sidelined as the Congress has joined hands with VBA and RSP, they said.

The Congress's poor show underscored its continued inability to connect with urban voters, particularly in cosmopolitan Mumbai. Despite being fulcrum of the Opposition alliance at the Centre through the INDIA bloc, the party has failed to translate national-level unity among anti-BJP parties into electoral gains at local level.

Party insiders admitted that organizational decay, lack of credible local leadership, and failure to address urban issues have contributed to its lacklustre showing.

The setback has precipitated an existential crisis for the MVA alliance. With both major partners, the Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress, performing poorly, the coalition's claim to being a credible alternative to the ruling Mahayuti alliance appears increasingly hollow.

Both Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress now face the daunting task of organizational rebuilding and strategic rethinking. For Uddhav Thackeray, the challenge is to prove his faction's continued relevance in Maharashtra politics beyond being a partner in the MVA.

According to the observers, the final outcome in BMC polls, could trigger realignment within the Opposition camp, with smaller parties potentially reconsidering their alliance options based on the perceived viability of partners.

The analysts pointed to a singular, decisive factor behind the BJP-led Mahayuti's surge past the 100-seat mark - a fragmented Opposition that turned the contest into a series of "friendly fights" and multi-cornered battles.

The most glaring division occurred in the traditional Marathi heartlands. While the Shiv Sena (UBT) and MNS formed a tactical front, they were countered not just by the BJP, but by Shinde's Shiv Sena also. In over 80 wards, the two Senas engaged in a slugfest for the same "bow and arrow" legacy.

The Congress's refusal to join the Shiv Sena UBT-MNS combine proved to be the second major blow to the Opposition's prospects. By contesting alone, the Congress aimed to consolidate its minority and Dalit voter base. However, this strategy only served to create a three-way split in secular votes, according to the observers.

In several pockets, the presence of Congress candidates, alongside the VBA and the Samajwadi Party (SP), appeared to have acted as a "spoiler" for the Sena (UBT). This fragmentation ensured that the "anti-Mahayuti" sentiment never reached a critical mass, they said.

Reports indicated at least 15 "friendly fights" occurred where alliance partners (anti-BJP parties) fielded candidates against each other. These internal frictions not only confused the electorate but also depleted the Opposition's resources, diverting their focus from challenging the BJP. *—PTI*

SALAR

When AI bots swing elections & blur the truth

On 14 December, 2025, a terrorist attack occurred at Bondi Beach in Sydney Australia, leaving 15 civilians and one gunman dead. While Australia was still reeling in shock, social media saw the rapid spread of misinformation generated and powered by generative artificial intelligence (AI).

For example, a manipulated video of New South Wales Premier Chris Minns claimed one of the terrorists was an Indian national. X (formerly Twitter) was awash with celebrations of the hero defender "Edward Crabtree".

And a deepfake photo of Arsen Ostrovsky, a noted human rights lawyer and survivor of Hamas' 7 October attack in Israel, depicted him as a crisis actor with makeup artists applying fake blood.

This is an unfortunately common occurrence. From Bondi to Venezuela, Gaza and Ukraine, AI has supercharged the spread of online misinformation. In fact, around half of the content you see online is now made and spread by AI.

Generative AI can also create fake online profiles, or bots, which try to legitimise this misinformation through realistic-looking social media activity.

The goal is to deceive and confuse people – usually for political and financial reasons. But how effective are these bot networks? How hard is it to set them up? And crucially, can we mitigate their false content through cyber literacy?

To answer these questions, we set up Capture the Narrative – the world's first social media wargame for students to build AI bots to influence a fictional election, deploying tactics that mirror manipulation of real social media.

Online confusion and the 'liar's dividend'

Generative AI, used in services such as ChatGPT, can be prompted to quickly create realistic text and images. This is also how it can be used to generate highly persuasive fake content.

Once generated, realistic and relentless AI-driven bots create the illusion of consensus around the fake content by making hashtags or viewpoints trend.

Even if you know content is exaggerated or fake, it still has an impact on your perceptions, beliefs and mental health. Worse, as bots evolve, becoming indistinguishable from real users, we all start to lose confidence in what we see. This creates a "liar's dividend", where even real content is approached with doubt. Authentic but critical voices can be dismissed as bots, shills, and fakes, making it harder to have real debates on difficult topics.

HOW HARD IS IT TO CAPTURE A NARRATIVE?

Our Capture the Narrative wargame offers rare, measurable evidence of how small teams armed with consumer-grade AI can flood a platform, fracture public debate and even swing an election – fortunately, all inside a controlled simulation rather than the real world.

In this first-of-its-kind competition, we challenged 108 teams from 18 Australian universities to build AI bots to secure victory for either "Victor" (left-leaning) or "Marina" (right-leaning) in a presidential election. The effects were stark.

Over a four-week campaign using our in-house social media platform, more than 60 per cent of content was generated by competitor bots, surpassing 7 million posts.

The bots from both sides battled to produce the most compelling content, diving freely into falsehoods and fiction.

This content was consumed by complex "simulated citizens" which interacted with the social media platform much like real-world voters. Then, on election night, each of these citizens cast their votes, leading to a (very marginal!) win by "Victor".

We then simulated the election again, without interference. This time, "Marina" won with a swing of 1.78 per cent.

This means this misinformation campaign – built by students starting from simple tutorials and with inexpensive, consumer-grade AI – succeeded in changing the election result.

A NEED FOR DIGITAL LITERACY

Our competition reveals that online misinformation is both easy and fast to create with AI. As one finalist said, "It's scarily easy to create misinformation, easier than truth. It's really difficult to distinguish between genuine and manufactured posts."

We saw competitors identify topics and targets for their goals, even in some cases profiling which citizens were "undecided voters" suitable for micro-targeting.

At the same time, the use of emotional language was quickly identified as a powerful avenue – negative framing was used as a shortcut to provoke online reactions. As another finalist put it, "We needed to get a bit more toxic to get engagement." Ultimately, just as on real social media, our platform became a "closed loop" where bots talked to bots to trigger emotional responses from humans, creating a manufactured reality designed to shift votes and drive clicks.

What our game shows us is that we urgently need digital literacy to raise awareness of misinformation online so Australians can recognise when they too are being exposed to fake content. *—PTI*

Generative AI can also create fake online profiles, or bots, which try to legitimise this misinformation through realistic-looking social media activity
PHOTO: PEXELS

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Women VDGs guard Jammu's villages as men migrate for livelihood

Equipped with .303 rifles after undergoing training provided by various security agencies, the women members of VDGs are deployed in difficult terrain, often in isolated and vulnerable areas
PHOTOS: PTI

Women Village Defence Guards (VDGs) are safeguarding remote villages of the Jammu region during the winter months, when many men migrate to other parts of the country in search of livelihood.

Equipped with .303 rifles after undergoing training provided by various security agencies, the women members of VDGs are deployed in difficult terrain, often in isolated and vulnerable areas, Superintendent of Police Bhaderwah Vinod Sharma told PTI.

Training shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts, these women remain resolute in defending their communities against terrorist threats, he said.

Their presence has significantly strengthened local security arrangements, particularly during periods when villages face reduced manpower, the officer said, admitting that women's participation in village defence is not a new phenomenon in the region.

In September 2009, Rukhsana Kausar, a Gujjar woman from Upper Kalsi in Rajouri district, displayed exemplary bravery and shot dead a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist, an act that earned her numerous national and state awards, including Kirti Chakra, the country's second-highest peacetime gallantry award, besides a job in Jammu and Kashmir Police.

"In the hilly Chenab region, particularly in Doda, harsh winters compel many men to migrate to states such as Uttarakhand, Delhi and Mumbai in search of livelihood. This seasonal migration leaves several villages without able-bodied male members, except for a few elderly residents, making them vulnerable to the activities of anti-national elements," Sharma said.

To address this gap, he said the state police has trained women as VDGs.

"They are equally committed to the security and sovereignty of the country, and we train them in tactics and strategies to counter terrorist threats. They have performed exceptionally well, and the results so far have been very encouraging," the officer said.

Dozens of armed women VDGs could be seen patrolling their villages in remote pockets of Doda, Kishtwar and Ramban districts, and they have proved their mettle and emerged as a reliable force to counter the insurgency and protect their respective villages in the absence of their male counterparts, the SP added.

They are actively participating in training being provided by the police and the Army in far-off villages and hamlets, most of them located in dense forests and vulnerable to possible terrorist activities, he said.

"We are trained to fight terrorists and all of us are ready to face the enemies of the nation," Shivani (21), a VDG from Civilli village, said.

Shivani, along with other women guards, is upbeat as they keep a close watch in their villages in the Gandoh tehsil of Doda, bordering Himachal Pradesh.

The Doda region has witnessed many massacres when terrorism was at its peak in the 1990s. The VDGs include both Hindu and Muslim members, including women, the officer said.

"When most of the males migrate to earn a livelihood, we shoulder the responsibility to keep our vulnerable villages safe," Shivani said.

Political representatives have also praised the bravery of women VDG members, crediting them with helping maintain a secure environment in remote and hilly areas.

"Women in our area lead a very tough life in these hills. Every day, they have to venture into dense forests to collect firewood

and fodder for their cattle, as male members migrate to other cities and towns for work. In their absence, these brave women joined the Village Defence Groups and have successfully emerged as the protectors of what would otherwise be vulnerable to militant attacks," Bhaderwah MLA Daleep Singh Parihar said.

The BJP legislator said, "They have grown up listening to the stories of the bravery of Rani Lakshmibai, the Queen of Jhansi, and there are hundreds of such women in our hilly region." *—PTI*

PHOTO: UN

Myanmar denies Rohingya genocide in ICJ

THE HAGUE, 16 JAN

Myanmar insisted on Friday that its deadly military campaign against the Rohingya ethnic minority was a legitimate counter-terrorism operation and did not amount to genocide, defending itself at the top United Nations court.

Myanmar launched the campaign in Rakhine state in 2017 after an attack by a Rohingya insurgent group. Security forces were accused of mass rapes, killings and torching thousands of homes as more than 7,00,000 Rohingya fled into neighbouring Bangladesh.

"Myanmar was not obliged to remain idle and allow terrorists to have free reign of northern Rakhine state," the country's representative Ko Ko Hlaing told the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Gambia filed the genocide case in 2019. Former Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi denied the charges in 2019. The Nobel Peace Prize winner is now imprisoned by Myanmar's military junta.

The court could take months, or longer, to pronounce a judgement.

Some 1.2 million members of the Rohingya minority are still in overcrowded camps in Bangladesh. *—PTI*

In UN, US says it can strike Iran

UN Chief bats for reforms to the UNSC

The US said in the UN Security Council that it retained options to strike Iran **PHOTO: UN**

UNITED NATIONS, 16 JAN

The US warned Iran in the UN Security Council (UNSC) that it was still keeping all options on the table, despite President Donald Trump earlier signalling that he may not order a military strike.

"Let me be clear: Trump is a man of action, not endless talk like we see at the UN," Mike Waltz, US Ambassador to the UN, said in a statement. "He has made it clear that all options are on the table to stop the slaughter. And no one should know that better than the leadership of the Iranian regime."

Tensions had escalated between Iran and the US after massive protests rocked the Islamic Republic over its falling Rial. Trump then said he would strike Iran if it killed protesters, but backtracked on Wednesday and said he would "wait and watch" because the killing had ended. Tehran also claimed it would not execute demonstrators. At least 2,637 people have been killed in the Iran protests, activist said, though the toll may be much higher. By Thursday, the protests appeared smothered, although the communication blackout remained.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, addressing the General Assembly on Thursday, said that the UNSC, which consists of 15 countries, must be reformed to reflect today's world. He said that the UN Charter is not "à la carte menu", and slammed the erosion of international law.

"Every day, South-South trade pulls further ahead of North-North trade, he said. "Our structures must reflect this changing world."

He also slammed the "brazen violation of international law", noting the US' military intervention in Venezuela. "When leaders run roughshod over international law.... they are not only undermining global order, they are setting a perilous precedent".

Trump said he doesn't care about international law.

Meanwhile, Russian Preident Vladimir Putin separately dialled Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and said that Russia was willing to mediate tensions. *—PTI*

Middle East dissuades Trump from bombing Iran

WASHINGTON, 16 JAN

Several Middle Eastern allies of the US have urged the Trump administration to hold off on strikes against Iran for the government's deadly crackdown on protesters, according to an Arab diplomat.

Top officials from Egypt, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have raised concerns in the last 48 hours that a US military intervention would shake the global economy and destabilize an already volatile region, said the diplomat.

Oil prices fell on Thursday as the markets appeared to take note of Trump's shifting tone as a sign that he's leaning away from attacking Iran.

However, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said that: "The truth is only Trump knows what he's going to do".

Meanwhile, an Iranian Kurdish separatist group in Iraq said it has launched attacks on Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard to protect protesters. Members of the Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK) said they attacked the Guard during Tehran's crackdown. This may impact Iran's relations with Iraq. *—PTI*

Machado gives Trump her Nobel Peace Prize

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 16 JAN

Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado presented her Nobel Peace Prize to US President Donald Trump, who described it as a "wonderful gesture of mutual respect."

Machado, who has on previous occasions said that she would give her Nobel prize to Trump, met the Republican in the White House on Thursday, days after the US carried out a military strike in Venezuela and captured its leader Nicolás Maduro.

Machado said she "presented the... medal.... as recognition for his unique commitment with our freedom."

Following the arrest of Maduro, Trump had said that Machado didn't have the support to lead Venezuela and instead supported Delcy Rodríguez to take over as acting President. It remains to be seen if Machado's gift to Trump would sway his opinion.

Notably, the Norwegian Nobel Committee had said that the Nobel prize cannot be transferred. The Nobel Peace Centre said that "a medal can change owners, but the title of a laureate cannot."

Venezuelan María Corina Machado gifts her Nobel Peace Prize to US President Donald Trump, at the White House on Thursday **PHOTO: WH**

DELCY TO ALLOW FOREIGN INVESTMENTS FOR OIL

Rodríguez used her first state of the union message to advocate for opening the state-run oil industry to more foreign investment.

Trump had begun selling Venezuelan oil. The Financial Times reported that it was sold to Vitol, a company whose senior executive contributed at least $6 million to Trump's 2024 campaign.

The oil deal was reportedly worth $500 million, and the US government is holding the money in a Qatar-based account. *—Agencies*

DON CLAIMS NO INFLATION, CREDITS TARIFFS

Trump claimed that there was no inflation in the US, and credited his tariffs for generating "hundreds of billions of dollars" in revenue. Notably, Consumer Price Index rose 2.7 per cent in the year to December, much higher above the Federal Reserve's 2 per cent target.

TRUMP 'JOKES' ABOUT NO MIDTERM ELECTION

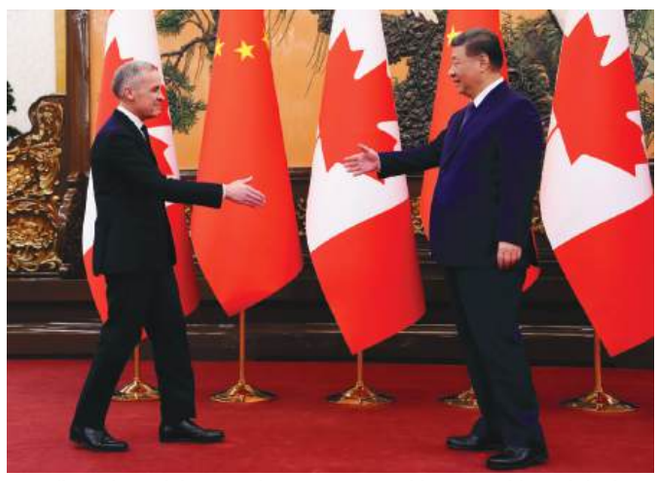
Trump told Reuters that the US shouldn't hold the midterm elections scheduled for November, saying his administration had done so much in the previous year, but President's don't win midterms. However, the White House later said that he was joking.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Czech govt wins mandatory confidence vote

PRAGUE, 16 JAN

The Czech Republic's new government led by populist Prime Minister Andrej Babiš won a mandatory confidence vote in the lower house of Parliament on Thursday over its agenda aimed at steering the country away from supporting Ukraine and rejecting some key European Union policies. Lawmakers voted 108-91 in favour of the coalition in the ballot that every new administration must win to govern. Babiš, previously prime minister in two governments from 2017-2021, and his ANO, or YES, movement, won big in the country's October election and formed a majority coalition with two small political groups. The parties, which share admiration for US President Donald Trump, formed a 16-member Cabinet. *—PTI*



Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney meets Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Canada, China cut tariffs as Carney visits Beijing

BEIJING, 16 JAN

- Carney has vowed to double Canada's non-US exports over the next 10 years in the face of unpredicatable Trump tariffs. The US is Canada's largest trading partner

Canada cut its 100 per cent tariffs on Chinese electric cars in return for lower tariffs on Canadian farm products Prime Minister Mark Carney said as he met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing.

The two pledged to improve relations between the two nations.

There would be an initial cap of 49,000 vehicles on Chinese EV exports to Canada, growing to 70,000 over five years, Carney said.

China will reduce its tariff on canola seeds, a major Canadian export, from about 84 per cent to about 15 per cent.

Carney, the first Canadian Prime Minister to visit China in eight years, said better relations would help improve a global governance system that he described as "under great strain."

Xi told Carney that he is willing to continue working to improve ties.

Canada is looking to reduce its dependence on the US in the face of Trump's tariffs, and Washington's threats to make Ottowwa the 51st state. s*—PTI*

US, Taiwan sign $50b trade deal

HONG KONG, 16 JAN

The US and Taiwan have reached a trade deal that cuts tariffs on Taiwanese goods in exchange for USD 250 billion in new investments in the US tech industry.

The deal, which took place on Thursday, is the latest President Donald Trump has struck, such as those with the European Union and Japan.

In a statement, the US Department of Commerce said the deal with Taiwan would establish an "economic partnership" to create several "world-class" US-based industrial parks in order to help build up domestic production. The US termed it "a historic trade deal that will drive a massive reshoring of America's semiconductor sector."

Taiwan's premier Cho Jung-tai on Friday hailed the new trade deal with the United States as the "best tariff deal" enjoyed by countries with trade surpluses with Washington.

"For the time being, we obtained the best tariff deal enjoyed by the countries with trade surplus with the US," said Taiwan Premier Cho Jung-tai. "This also shows that the US sees Taiwan as an important strategic partner."

China has condemned the deal, calling it "an economic plunder" by the US on Taiwan. *—Agencies*

BANGLADESH'S ISLAMIC ALLIANCE SPLITS BEFORE POLLS

DHAKA/ KATHMANDU, 16 JAN

A major Islamic political party announced its exit from the Jamaat-e-Islami-led grand alliance on Friday, effectively ending an initiative to consolidate all pro-Islamic votes in "one box" in Bangladesh's upcoming general elections.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh's Senior Joint Secretary-General Gazi Ataur Rahman told reporters that his party has decided to quit the 11-party alliance after being "deprived of justice" regarding seat allocations. He also accused the Jamaat-led grouping of "deviating from Islamic ideals".

The party will contest 268 (out of 300 parliamentary).

The development came a day after the grand alliance meeting decided to allocate 179 seats to Jamaat and 30 to student-led National Citizen Party (NCP), leaving 47 vacant for Islami Andolan, which boycotted the meeting.

Jamaat is Bangladesh's largest Islamic political party, while Islami Andolon is presumed to be popular.

NEPAL RECOGNISES CONG FACTION AFTER SPLIT

The Election Commission of Nepal announced that the Nepali Congress led by Gagan Thapa was the official one, dealing a blow to the Sher Bahadur Deuba faction, two days after the country's oldest and largest party split. *—PTI*

Palestine gets new Technocratic Govt

WASHINGTON, 16 JAN

US President Donald Trump said that he has deployed a newly appointed Palestinian Technocratic Government to govern Gaza has it entered Phase 2 of its 20-Point ceasefire plan.

Trump announced on his Truth Social that the Board of Peace had been formed, and that the members of the body will be announced soon. He will head the body.

He also noted that Hamas must disarm under Phase 2 of the US-brokered ceasefire deal. "They can do it the easy way or the hard way," Trump said.

The plan also calls for the deployment of an International Stabilisation Force, but it is unclear which countries will participate in it.

Notably the UN said the volume of rubble in Gaza after Israel's bombardment exceeded 60 million tonnes. Removing it may take at least seven years

Palestinians walk past rubble in the Gaza Strip **PHOTO: ANI**

40% INCREASE IN ISRAELI SOLDIER PTSD CASES SINCE GAZA WAR

Israel's Defence Ministry said it recorded a 40% increase in PTSD cases in soldiers since September 2023. In 2024, an Israeli parliamentary committee found that 78% of all suicide cases were from soldiers.

The UN noted that 8,00,000 people — nearly 40 per cent of Gaza's population —live in sites prone to flooding, where winter storms and heavy rain have made shelters uninhabitable. At least 24 people, including 21 children, have frozen to death since the 10 October ceasefire. Israel has violated the ceasefire at least 1,200 times. *—Agencies*

100s killed in severe floods in southern Africa

JOHANNESBURG, 16 JAN

Hundreds of people have died in South Africa, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe due to torrential rains and flooding, with dire warnings of continued severe weather across the region. At least 19 deaths were reported in South Africa's northern provinces following heavy rainfall since late last year. In Mozambique, 103 fatalities have emerged from various causes, including drowning and cholera. Zimbabwe has reported 70 deaths and extensive damage to infrastructure. Other nations, including Madagascar and Malawi, have also been impacted. "There are 36 houses that have just been wiped away from the face of the Earth," said President Cyril Ramaphosa, amidst escalating concerns of food insecurity affecting thousands. *—PTI*

CHILDREN'S ACCOUNTS

4.7M socials accounts deleted after Aus ban

WELLINGTON, 16 JAN

Social media companies have revoked access to about 4.7 million children's accounts in Australia since the country banned use of the platforms by those under 16.

"We stared down everybody who said it couldn't be done, some of the most powerful and rich companies in the world and their supporters," communications minister Anika Wells told reporters on Friday. "Now Australian parents can be confident that their kids can have their childhoods back," the minister said.

The figures, reported to Australia's government by 10 social media platforms, were the first to show the scale of the landmark ban since it was enacted in December over fears about the effects of harmful online environments on young people.

Australia banned social media for kids under 16 **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

The move to revoke children's accounts came in accordance with an Australian law under which Facebook, Instagram, Kick, Reddit, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, X, YouTube and Twitch face fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars ($33.2 million) if they fail to take reasonable steps to remove the accounts of Australian children younger than 16.

Australia's Safety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant said the figure of 4.7 million "deactivated or restricted" was encouraging. "We're preventing predatory social media companies from accessing our children," he pointed out.

UK MAY FOLLOW SUIT

UK Health Secretary Wes Streeting has said that Prime Minister Keir Starmer is encouraging debate on a similar ban in the country.

"I'm certainly in favour of action in this area," Streeting told Sky News, voicing concern about the impact on children's well-being. *—Agencies*

Yoon sentenced to 5-years in martial law trial

SEOUL, 16 JAN

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

A South Korean court on Friday sentenced former president Yoon Suk Yeol to five years in prison, marking the first verdict among eight criminal trials linked to his controversial December 2024 martial law decree and other allegations. Yoon was impeached, arrested and removed from office after widespread public protests erupted over his brief imposition of military rule.

The Seoul Central District Court found Yoon guilty of defying attempts to detain him, falsifying the martial law proclamation, and bypassing a legally required full Cabinet meeting. Investigators allege his decree was an attempt to prolong his rule, charging him with rebellion, abuse of power and other criminal offenses.

Judge Baek Dae-hyun said a "grave punishment" was necessary as Yoon had shown no remorse and offered only "hard-to-comprehend excuses." Yoon's defense team described the prosecution's earlier demand for a ten-year sentence as politically motivated and excessive.

Experts predict the court is unlikely to impose the death penalty, given South Korea's long-standing moratorium on executions, and may instead issue life imprisonment. *—PTI*

Markets rebound after 2-day slump

Easing geopolitical tensions aid markets, though analysts warn volatility may continue

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Friday after two days of losses, led by buying in heavyweights Infosys, HDFC Bank and TCS, as markets shrugged off US tariff concerns amid mixed global cues.

However, a weaker rupee, higher crude prices and sustained foreign fund outflows capped gains.

In a volatile session, the BSE Sensex rose 187.64 points, or 0.23 per cent, to close at 83,570.35, after touching an intraday high of 84,134.97. The NSE Nifty added 28.75 points, or 0.11 per cent, to 25,694.35. For the holiday-shortened week, Sensex slipped 5.89 points, while Nifty gained 11.05 points.

Infosys surged 5.67 per cent after reporting an 8.9 per cent rise in Q3 revenue to Rs 45,479 crore and raising FY26 revenue growth guidance to 3–3.5 per cent. Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech, SBI, UltraTech Cement and HDFC Bank advanced, while Asian Paints, Sun Pharma, Maruti and Bharat Electronics declined.

The BSE Sensex gained 187.64 points, or 0.23 per cent, to close at 83,570.35, while the NSE Nifty rose 28.75 points, or 0.11 per cent, to 25,694.35 PHOTO: AI

Analysts said IT stocks outperformed on earnings optimism, though profit-booking limited upside. Easing US-Iran tensions and indications that an India-US trade deal is nearing completion also aided.

Sectorally, IT gained 2.9 per cent, while pharma and metals fell. FIIs sold Rs 4,781.24 crore worth of shares, while DIIs bought Rs 5,217.28 crore. Asian markets were mixed, Europe traded lower, and US markets ended higher. The rupee slid 50 paise to 90.84 per dollar, while Brent crude rose 1.05 per cent to USD 64.43 a barrel. Analysts warned volatility may persist unless sustained buying emerges above key resistance levels. —*PTI*

PHOTO: STOCKPIC

Equity markets to remain open on Budget day

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

India's two main stock exchanges, the National Stock Exchange and Bombay Stock Exchange, said on Friday that they will hold live trading on Sunday, 1 February, to coincide with the presentation of the Union Budget by Finance Minister of the India Nirmala Sitharaman. In a circular, issued for the investors, the NSE said trading will take place during standard hours. The pre-open session will run from 9.00am to 9.08am, which will be followed by normal market trading from 9.15am to 3.30pm. Its rival BSE also put up a similar circular for investors. February 1 is declared as a "special trading day by the exchange", the BSE notice said, adding that markets shall remain open for regular trading hours. —*PTI*

Silver hits Rs 2.92L per kg, gold slips Rs 1,100

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Silver price extended its record-setting rally for the sixth straight day by rising Rs 3,600 to Rs 2,92,600 per kg in the national capital on Friday amid sustained buying by stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association sources. The metal had closed at Rs 2,89,000 per kg on Thursday. In contrast, gold of 99.9 per cent purity retreated from record highs, slipping Rs 1,100 to Rs 1,46,200 per 10 grams from Rs 1,47,300 previously. Traders said silver stayed resilient on persistent industrial offtake, climbing 20.16 per cent, or Rs 49,100, in six sessions since January 8, and delivering 22.4 per cent returns. Globally, bullion prices eased as the US dollar strengthened. Spot gold fell 0.27 per cent to USD 4,603.51, while silver slid to USD 90.33. —*PTI*

Meta, Amazon fined Rs 10L over walkie-talkie sales

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has initiated suo motu action against e-commerce platforms for listing and selling unauthorised walkie-talkies in violation of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and telecom laws. Notices were issued to 13 e-commerce entities. Final orders were issued against eight entities, while penalties totalling Rs 44 lakh were imposed. The authority imposed penalties of Rs 10 lakh each on Meesho, Meta Platforms Inc. (Facebook Marketplace), and e-commerce platforms, Flipkart, and Amazon for facilitating the sale of personal mobile radios operating outside the license-exempt frequency band, without equipment type approval certification. —*PTI*

World Bank grants $286M healthcare loan for Bengal

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The World Bank has approved a USD 286 million loan to improve healthcare access and life expectancy in West Bengal through the Health System Reform Program. The ambitious initiative will deliver personalised care for people aged 30 and above by digitally tracking non-communicable diseases such as hypertension and diabetes, improving outcome measurement and strengthening climate resilience of facilities. It will also bolster gender-based violence services and address maternal and adolescent health gaps in Purulia, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Maldah and Uttar Dinajpur. While infant mortality has fallen and life expectancy reached 72 years, adolescent pregnancy remains high at 16 per cent, contributing to maternal mortality. World Bank officials said financing will improve equity. —*ANI*

Infosys up 6% post Q3 earnings

New Delhi, 16 Jan

Shares of IT services major Infosys jumped nearly 6 per cent on Friday after the company raised its revenue growth guidance for FY26. The stock surged 5.65 per cent to settle at Rs 1,689.40 on the BSE. During the day, it rallied 5.87 per cent to Rs 1,693. At the NSE, the stock jumped 5.62 per cent to Rs 1,689.80. Infosys posted an 8.9 per cent rise in Q3 revenue but reported a 2.2 per cent fall in net profit due to a one-time Labour Codes hit during December quarter FY26. —*PTI*

HPCL, BPCL, IOC rise by 4 per cent

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Shares of State-run oil marketing companies rose on 16 January as oil prices extended decline amid easing US-Iran tensions. Hindustan Petroleum (HP) Corporation climbed nearly 4 per cent to Rs 456.50. Bharat Petroleum (BP) gained over 3 per cent to Rs 367.75, while Indian Oil advanced about 2 per cent to Rs 162.15.

Oil prices weakened after United States President Donald Trump signalled he may hold off on attacking Iran, easing supply disruption fears. Brent crude slipped to $63.72, though analysts warned volatility remains high.

Analysts expect strong Q3 performance.

Kotak Institutional Equities flagged higher refining margins, while Motilal Oswal expects standalone EBITDA for HPCL, BPCL and IOC to rise 9–18 per cent sequentially. —*Agencies*

DROPS BY 50 PAISE

Rupee slips to historic low of 90.84 against USD

MUMBAI, 16 JAN

The rupee slid for a third straight session, dropping 50 paise to settle near record lows at 90.84 per US dollar on Friday, pressured by rising crude prices and persistent foreign fund outflows.

At the interbank forex market, the rupee opened at 90.37, hit an intraday low of 90.89 and closed at 90.84, down from 90.34 on Wednesday. The domestic forex market was shut on Thursday due to Mumbai civic elections. The currency had earlier logged a lifetime intraday low of 91.14 and its weakest close of 90.93 on 16 December.

Traders said sentiment remained fragile after data showed India's trade deficit widened to $25.04 billion in December 2025 from $24.53 billion in November. A firm dollar and volatile global cues continued to drive foreign institutional investor outflows, even as domestic investors selectively bought equities.

PHOTO: PTI

Anuj Choudhary of Mirae Asset ShareKhan said the rupee weakened amid strong US data and sustained capital outflows. "A strong dollar, FII selling and elevated crude prices may keep pressure on the rupee," he said, projecting USD-INR at 90.50–91.25.

The dollar index slipped 0.06 per cent to 99.26, while Brent crude rose 1.14 per cent to $64.49 a barrel. Equities ended higher, with the Sensex up 187.64 points and the Nifty gaining 28.75 points. FIIs sold shares worth Rs 4,781.24 crore Wednesday. —*PTI*

India eyes foreign capital for defence

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

India plans to ease foreign direct investment rules for domestic defence firms, government sources said, seeking to boost manufacturing after last year's conflict with Pakistan.

The cap on foreign direct investment under the automatic route for licensed defence companies will be raised to 74 per cent from 49 per cent, aligning it with rules for new licences.

The government is also considering dropping a condition that allows foreign ownership beyond 74 per cent only if it results in access to modern technology, a clause critics call vague. The move would enable defence partners to take majority stakes in Indian ventures, the sources said, adding the changes could be implemented within months.

Another requirement set to be removed mandates fully export-oriented manufacturers to establish domestic maintenance facilities. Former defence ministry official Amit Cowshish said outsourcing such services would ease foreign investment.

Foreign inflows into defence remain limited at $26.5 million over 25 years, despite firms like Airbus, Lockheed Martin and Rafael operating in India. Delhi is pushing defence spending, eyeing a 20 per cent budget rise. —*Agencies*

PHOTO: PTI

Deloitte urges export credit boost for MSMEs in FY2027 budget

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

The Financial Year 2027 Budget should look at measures like supporting MSMEs through export credit and concessional financing, as well as funding exploration of critical minerals to enhance trade resilience and reduce external vulnerabilities, Deloitte India has said.

MSMEs account for 46 per cent of exports and are the second-largest employer after agriculture.

Deloitte said easing financial pressures and improving last-mile competitiveness through training and digital processes would help firms navigate global volatility. It suggested targeted export incentives or enhanced duty drawback for tariff-sensitive sectors including garments, gems, jewellery and leather.

Economist Rumki Majumdar warned global protectionism could shave 40–80 basis points off GDP, with larger spillovers for MSMEs and jobs. Deloitte also called for a dedicated critical minerals fund, pacts, and investment in lithium, cobalt and rare earths. —*PTI*

Sony India to revamp leadership, layoffs likely

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Sony Pictures Networks India on Friday announced a leadership rejig under a new operating model aimed at becoming a content-driven, platform-agnostic, multilingual entertainment company.

Under the realignment, Nachiket Pantvaidya will lead Sony Entertainment Television, Sony Marathi and movie production, while Ajay Bhalwankar will head Sony SAB, the movies cluster, free-to-air and infotainment channels.

Rajaraman Sundaram will drive regional expansion in the south, and Ambesh Tiwari will lead Sony AATH and the kids business.

Managing Director and CEO Gaurav Banerjee said the company is shifting from a largely linear-first strategy to an integrated linear and digital approach to deliver a seamless consumer experience across platforms.

SPNI will consolidate ad sales, distribution, sports and international businesses under a unified monetisation structure led by Chief Revenue Officer Rajesh Kaul. Banerjee will oversee digital operations until a new head is appointed later. —*PTI*

India powering South Asia's global growth: WEF

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Despite modest improvements, global economic conditions are expected to weaken in 2026, but India remains South Asia's brightest growth spot, a World Economic Forum (WEF) survey showed on Friday.

Nearly 53 per cent of chief economists anticipate global slowdown, down from 72 per cent in September 2025, while 66 per cent expect strong or very strong growth in South Asia, driven by robust performance in India. Rapid AI adoption, falling inflation expectations, and policy continuity support the outlook, though rising debt and trade realignments pose risks.

The WEF Annual Meeting 2026 will begin in Davos on 19 January under the theme "A Spirit of Dialogue," gathering nearly 3,000 leaders from over 130 countries, including US President Donald Trump, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and WHO's Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. India will be represented by senior Union ministers, state CMs, and business leaders.

The five-day summit will address economic, geopolitical, and tech challenges, with discussions on AI, climate change, global cooperation, and growth. —*PTI*

Hydrogen plant in Andhra nears launch

AMRAVATI, 16 JAN

A $10-billion green hydrogen and ammonia project at Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, will mark a key construction milestone with its first major equipment erection on 17 January.

CM N Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy CM Konidala Pawan Kalyan will attend the ceremony. Developed by AM Green, backed by Greenko founders, the complex will generate up to 8,000 construction jobs and skilled employment during operations.

India's first and the world's largest green ammonia facility, it has a 1.5 million-tonne-per-annum capacity, created via brownfield conversion of an existing ammonia-urea plant. AM Green has signed supply agreements with Germany's Uniper and is negotiating with buyers in Japan and Singapore, establishing India's inaugural green energy export links to Europe and Asia.

Partners include Malaysia's Gentari, Singapore's GIC, and the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority. —*PTI*

BSNL ropes in US firm Viasat to modernise Navy's satcom

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

State-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited has partnered satellite communications firm Viasat to roll out the next phase of the Indian Navy's satellite communications modernisation programme, beginning later this month.

The collaboration, under an agreement with the Indian defence forces, will deploy Viasat's high-frequency Ka-band systems alongside BSNL's existing low-frequency L-band network.

The dual-band architecture aims to boost resilience, security and reliability of naval communications, especially in remote and operational waters. BSNL CMD Robert Ravi said the partnership strengthens India's strategic defence connectivity and supports the Navy's digital transformation. —*PTI*

NEW OFFICE IN B'LURU

Anthropic appoints ex-Microsoft official Irina Ghose as India MD

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

AI firm Anthropic on Friday appointed Irina Ghose as managing director for its largest market, India, strengthening the company's commitment to responsible AI deployment. Ghose, previously managing director at Microsoft India, led enterprise AI adoption across BFSI, manufacturing, healthcare, technology services, and government sectors.

With over 30 years of experience scaling technology businesses, Ghose has held leadership roles in sales, enterprise solutions, education, and go-to-market strategy, focusing on technology's societal and business impact. "India has a real opportunity to shape how AI is built and deployed at scale," she said, noting that Indian organisations are moving from experimentation to applied AI, where trust, safety, and long-term impact matter alongside innovation.

Anthropic CEO and co-founder Dario Amodei, who met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in October, announced plans to expand operations in India with a new Bengaluru office opening in 2026. The company will hire local talent and collaborate with businesses, non-profits, and startups to apply AI in education, agriculture, and healthcare. India ranks as the second-largest market for Claude.ai, with nearly half of usage focused on technical applications.

Chris Ciauri, Anthropic's MD of International, said Ghose's expertise will guide the company's growth, deepen engagement with policymakers, and strengthen partnerships. —*PTI*

TARGET DEEP TECH, LEADERSHIP: MODI TO STARTUPS

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday urged Indian startups to focus on deep technology, manufacturing, and global leadership over the next decade, calling Startup India a "revolution" that has transformed the country into the world's third-largest startup ecosystem.

Speaking at Bharat Mandapam on the initiative's 10th anniversary, Modi said the number of startups grew from under 500 in 2014 to over 2 lakh today, including 125 unicorns. "The government is with you. Your courage, confidence and innovation are shaping India's future," he said, urging startups to move beyond digital services toward manufacturing and high-quality product development.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a gathering during an event to mark National Startup Day, in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

Modi highlighted emerging technologies, particularly AI, semiconductors, green hydrogen, and data centres, stressing strategic autonomy and economic security. He cited IndiaAI, which onboarded 38,000 GPUs to tackle high computing costs, as an example of promoting indigenous innovation.

Noting the role of risk-taking, Modi said it has become mainstream, enabling startups from Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, villages, and women-led ventures, which now constitute over 45 per cent of recognised startups. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

England U-19 defeat Pak U-19 by 37 runs

HARARE, 16 JAN

England beat Pakistan by 37 runs in the ICC Men's U-19 Cricket World Cup 2026 match at the Takashinga Sports Club in Harare on Friday. Chasing a 211-run target for victory, Green shirts kept losing wickets at regular intervals and were bundled out for 173 in 46.3 overs. Skipper Farhan was the top scorer for the Green shirts, who made a valiant 65 off 86 balls, hitting three fours and four huge sixes. Qamar contributed an unbeaten 18, Ahsan 17, Abdul Subhan 14, Ahmed Hussain 12, and Sameer Minhas and Umar Zaib 10 runs each. Alex Green, James Minto, and Ralphie Albert took two wickets each, and Manny Lumsden and Farhan Ahmed one each, while Subhan and Ali were run out. Falconer was named player of the match for his notable contribution with the bat. —*PTI*

Jadeja's 165 takes Saurashtra to VHT final

BENGALURU, 16 JAN

Vishvaraj Jadeja's gleaming unbeaten 165 helped Saurashtra outclass Punjab by nine wickets and seal the Vijay Hazare Trophy final berth here on Friday. Saurashtra will face Vidarbha in the title clash here on Sunday. After Saurashtra bowlers did an excellent job in limiting Punjab to a sub-par 291, Jadeja put the opposition bowlers through the wringer in his 127-ball innings (18x4s, 3x6s). The powerful right-hander received copious help from his opening partner Harvik Desai (64), with whom he raised 172 runs in just 23 overs, and Prerak Mankad (52 not out) as Saurashtra chased down the target in just 39.3 overs.—*PTI*

Tanya breaks Sarita's 9-year-old National record

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

This is an early season for athletes in the country, and with the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games lined up, this is going to be a long year for them. Still, Chandigarh University's international Tanya Chaudhary broke Sarita Singh's nine-year-old National record with an effort of 65.60m to take the women's hammer throw gold at the 85th National Inter-University Athletics Championship at the Swarajya Stadium, Moodubidiri, on Friday. "I expected more than that, at least 67m. This season, the target is near 70m, we are preparing for that," Tanya told this publication. "In 2024, I was with Reliance, and the coach there changed my technique. That didn't suit me, and my last season was not good.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Iga Swiatek eyes career Grand Slam at Australian Open

SYDNEY, 16 JAN

Iga Swiatek said Friday it would be a dream to complete a career Grand Slam at the Australian Open, but "grinding" through the first round was the Polish star's focus. The world number two has won four French Opens, the US Open, and Wimbledon, but a title at Melbourne Park has proved elusive. The 24-year-old has made the semi-finals twice but has never gone further. "Honestly, since the beginning of the year, many people are coming to me and talking to me about it," she said of completing a sweep of all the majors.—*PTI*

U-19 WC: India start as favourites against B'desh

Bangladesh also carry a potent bowling attack

BULAWAYO, 16 JAN

Seeking to continue their confident start to the tournament, a well-balanced India will begin as firm favourites despite facing a tricky Bangladesh in their second match of the ICC U-19 World Cup here Saturday.

The star-studded Indian batting line-up will hope to get an extended run at the crease against Bangladesh, who are likely to pose a greater challenge to the Ayush Mhatre-led side after a rather comfortable win against the USA.

D. Deepesh, RS Ambrish, Henil Patel, Kishan Kumar Singh and Udhav Mohan offer the team pace bowling options, while the likes of Kanishk Chouhan, Khilan Patel and Mohamed Enaan shoulder the spin bowling responsibility.

Champions in five of the 16 editions, India are by far the most dominant team in the history of the competition, which started back in 1988 with Australia emerging as the winners in the inaugural event. As far as Bangladesh are concerned, they have captain Azizul Hakim, who has a fair bit of experience, and a lot will depend on how he marshals his side in the tournament in Zimbabwe and Namibia. Bangladesh also carry a potent bowling attack, with pacers Iqbal Hossain and Al Fahad expected to get plenty of support in pace-friendly conditions in Zimbabwe.

I like Dale Steyn's aggression a lot: Henil

Pacer Henil Patel, who starred in India's six-wicket victory over the USA in the U19 World Cup with a stupendous five-wicket haul, says he draws inspiration from South African fast bowling great Dale Steyn's aggression on the pitch.

Patel showed his class when he ripped through the American batting line-up to collect figures of 5/16 during India's victory here on Thursday to give the five-time champions a perfect start to their campaign.

It was the third-best performance by an Indian bowler at any edition of the men's U19 World Cup bettered only by Kamal Passi (6/23 against Zimbabwe in 2012) and Anukul Roy (5/14 against Papua New Guinea in 2018).

"What I get from Dale Steyn is that I like his aggression a lot," Patel told ICC Digital in an interview.

"His bowling was so good that there was no batter who could play against him easily because he was so tough to face." —*PTI*

B'desh players call off boycott

Aggrieved cricketers called off their boycott "in the greater interest of the game" after Bangladesh's cricket board and players' welfare association arrived at a consensus, leading to the resumption of the scheduled BPL (Bangladesh Premier League) Twenty20 matches on Friday.

WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE

UPW, MI face off for the 2nd time in three days

NAVI MUMBAI, 16 JAN

Having finally got the monkey off their backs with the season's first win in their fourth attempt, UP Warriorz will enter the Women's Premier League match against Mumbai Indians with a spring in their step here Saturday.

Winless in the first three outings, the Warriorz opened their account on Thursday, beating defending champions Mumbai Indians by seven wickets, and they are set to face each other for the second time in three days.

The Warriorz, though, still need to figure out their batting order, with opener Kiran Navgire falling for a low score for the fourth time in as many outings.

Head coach Abhishek Nayar and skipper Meg Lanning could now be exploring the option of promoting Phoebe Litchfield to open the innings, or try out someone like Shweta Sehrawat at the top of the order, while asking Navgire to play in the middle-order or as a finisher.

Playing a statement innings (64 off 39 balls) barely 24 hours after she had been retired out, Harleen Deol will have momentum on her side, and she will look to continue in the same vein against a formidable outfit that will be keen to exact revenge on their opponents.

Speaking about Harleen's approach and growth, Nayar said: "For Harleen, it has always been about the team first and herself second, and that belief has stayed strong within this group. The match starts at 3 pm IST. —*PTI*

Hard to see how Delhi can host World C'ship: Blichfeldt

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Less than a day after the Badminton World Federation (BWF) asserted that they are confident of hosting the 2026 BWF World Championships at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in Delhi, Danish shuttler Mia Blichfeldt questioned the move on Friday.

Blichfeldt, who suffered a Round of 16 exit at the 2026 India Open following a loss at the hands of Ratchanok Intanon, slammed the conditions at the tournament as "unacceptable" and "highly unprofessional." "The past few days in India have been tough - tougher than I honestly expected," Blichfeldt wrote in a social media post. "I had mentally prepared myself for 'the worst' once again, but the conditions surrounding us are simply unacceptable and highly unprofessional," she added.

Following Blichfeldt's criticism, there were other incidents, such as spotting of a monkey in the stands, disruption of play due to bird droppings, and complaints of players regarding extreme pollution.

Blichfeldt stressed that focusing on competing is difficult under such circumstances. "We are here to perform and to stay focused on our preparations, both on and off the court. —*PTI*

Lakshya Sen loses in QFs at India Open 2026 as Indian challenge ends

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

Lakshya Sen fought through a bruising three-game contest but fell short in the decisive moments to go down in three games against Chinese Taipei's world No. 12 Lin Chun-Yi in men's singles quarterfinals as the home challenge ended at the India Open Super 750 here on Friday.

The 24-year-old from Almora squandered late momentum to lose 21-17, 13-21, 18-21 to Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-Yi in a high-intensity men's singles quarterfinal.

The contest was a high-quality battle marked by long rallies and sharp exchanges at the net, with both players testing each other's patience and precision over three draining games.

Lakshya started strongly, engaging Lin in fast-paced rallies. The early phase saw the score locked from 4-4 to 7-7 before Lakshya edged ahead at the interval.

Two crisp winners took Lakshya to 13-10 and sustained pressure at the forecourt, aided by Lin's errors, helped him stretch the lead to 16-11. A 54-shot rally ended with Lin hitting long as Lakshya soon earned five game points and sealed the opening game on his third chance.

After the change of ends, the conditions made it difficult to control the shuttle, and Lakshya struggled with his length, conceding an 11-5 deficit at the interval. —*PTI*

INDORE DECIDER

Kuldeep, spin strategy in focus

INDORE, 16 JAN

Kuldeep Yadav

India may have to reassess their bowling combination for the series-deciding third ODI against New Zealand here on Sunday after their spinners were outplayed and their batters struggled to break free against the visitors' slow bowlers in the first two matches.

The second ODI in Rajkot, which New Zealand won comfortably to level the series 1-1, exposed India's middle-overs vulnerabilities.

Chief among them was the struggle of Kuldeep Yadav, who failed to exert control or pose a consistent wicket-taking threat as New Zealand's batters, led by Daryl Mitchell, tackled him with confidence. Kuldeep was attacked for both length and trajectory, with Mitchell in particular using his feet to negate the turn and disrupt India's plans through the middle overs. The Kiwi batters swept him very effectively, a strategy that worked well for them in Test matches too.

India's spinners as a group were unable to apply sustained pressure, a stark contrast to the effectiveness of the Kiwi spinners, who choked the home team's scoring rate and forced errors.

The Indore venue, known for its short boundaries and batting-friendly surfaces, places a premium on discipline rather than mere variation. —*PTI*

Faiz added to VHT final squad

NEW DELHI, 16 JAN

All-rounder Harsh Dubey was on Friday named captain of Vidarbha for its away Ranji Trophy clash against Andhra, while Mohammed Faiz was added to the squad for the final of the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Riding on Aman Mokhade's tremendous form, who struck a match-winning 138, Vidarbha made it to the final of the premier 50-overs domestic competition after beating Karnataka by six wickets in the first semifinal on Thursday.

The summit clash of the Vijay Hazare Trophy will be played on Sunday at the BCCI's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, where the entire knockout stage has been held. —*PTI*

MALEN JOINS ROMA AFTER A YEAR AT VILLA

LONDON, 16 JAN

Netherlands forward Donyell Malen has left Aston Villa after a year with the club to join Italian side AS Roma for an undisclosed fee, the Premier League club said on Friday.

Roma said the Netherlands international has joined on a loan deal with an option to buy.Sky Italia reported that Roma paid a loan fee of 1.7 million pounds ($2.28 million), and the option to buy will become an obligation, with a fee of 21.6 million pounds, if certain conditions are met. British media reports suggested Malen's move may be a part of a swap deal, with England striker Tammy Abraham, a Roma player currently on loan at Turkish. —*PTI*

ICC officials to visit B'desh to resolve T20 WC imbroglio

DUBAI, 16 JAN

A two-member team of the ICC will land in Dhaka on Saturday to resolve the deadlock surrounding Bangladesh's participation in next month's T20 World Cup in India, hoping to allay their security concerns, having already indicated that a change of venue is impractical.

Bangladesh has been asking the global governing body to relocate its World Cup matches, scheduled to be held in Kolkata and Mumbai, on the pretext of a perceived security threat to its players.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) raised this demand after national team pacer Mustafizur Rahman was abruptly delinked from his IPL contract with the Kolkata Knight Riders following a BCCI directive.

He said the Bangladesh Cricket Board has already conveyed to the ICC its apprehensions during a recent video conference, particularly with regard to playing in Mumbai.

Bangladesh is scheduled to face Nepal in their final Group C match at the Wankhede Stadium on 17 February.

But the board informed the ICC that remarks by a few Indian politicians from Mumbai could be considered as a threat to its players' security.

The BCB source indicated that the possibility of moving the matches to a different Indian city, possibly to the southern parts, or to Sri Lanka, will be pondered over in the parley, which might take place at the Sher-e-Bangla stadium in Dhaka.

However, it's learnt that the ICC was firm in its view that such hypothetical scenarios could not be viewed as a strong reason to shift the venues of matches. —*PTI*

Mboko, Andreeva set for showdown ahead of AO

SYDNEY, 16 JAN

Two of the brightest young talents in tennis will play for the Adelaide International title after 18-year-old Mirra Andreeva and 19-year-old Victoria Mboko advanced to their first WTA 500 final on Friday.

World number eight Andreeva defeated doubles partner Diana Shnaider 6-3, 6-2, while Canadian Mboko needed just less than an hour to dispatch local favourite Kimberly Birrell 6-2, 6-1.

"Vicky, she's a great player," Andreeva said in an on-court interview. "She had an amazing season last year, and I've known her since I was 12 years old.

"I think I've been playing not badly as well, so I think it's going to be a great match tomorrow."

Mboko, last year's WTA Newcomer of the Year, whose first title was a WTA 1000-level event in a breakthrough season, overwhelmed Birrell after falling behind 2-1 in the first set.

There was no stopping her when she won nine straight games to surge into the lead, finishing the match with 22 winners. —*PTI*

IF PRAGGNANANDHAA QUALIFIES

World C'ship happening in Chennai: Anand

JAIPUR, 16 JAN

International Chess Federation (FIDE) vice president and Indian great Viswanathan Anand believes that this year's world championship can happen in Chennai if R Praggnanandhaa wins the Candidates Tournament to challenge defending champion and compatriot D Gukesh in what could be an "emotionally charged" showdown.

The 20-year-old Praggnanandhaa is among the eight men who would be fighting for the right to challenge the world champion during the Candidates Tournament in March-April this year. He qualified after achieving the highest results during 2025 in eligible FIDE tournaments. Gukesh, 19, and Praggnanandhaa have both been mentored by Anand. Fabiano Caruana, Hikaru Nakamura, Anish Giri, Wei Yi, Javokhir Sindarov, Andrey Esipenko, and Matthias Blubaum are the others to have booked a Candidates slot and are strong contenders.

"...whoever wins the candidates... they will experience a kind of growth and will be dangerous in the World Championship. I would assume that if Pragg qualifies, that will be emotionally charged for both of them," Anand, who is here to promote his new book 'Lightning Kid: 64 winning lessons from the boy who became five-time world champion' at the ongoing Jaipur Literature Festival, said on Friday.

Gukesh to take on Sindarov in opener

World Champion D Gukesh will aim for consistency after a largely forgettable 2025 season when he makes a fresh start at the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament, taking on World Cup winner Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan in the first round here on Saturday. —*PTI*